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Six ONE-ACT PLAYS

BY

DANIEL A. LORD, S. J.

Author of "Our Nuns," etc.

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THE AUTHOR.

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FOREWORD

ST. FRANCIS of Assisi is credited by Dr. James Walsh, the great authority on "the thirteenth, the greatest of centuries," as the first to realize the important handmaid to religion that drama was to become; and today Gilbert Chesterton, having pored over the Assisian's story since boyhood, declares with forceful enthusiasm, that St. Francis was "a dramatist capable of acting the whole of his play"; that because of this *dramatic instinct* he has taught the world a large part of its lesson by a sort of *divine dumb alphabet*, and thus . . . "it is truly said that Francis of Assisi was one of the founders of the medieval drama and therefore of the modern drama."

Art is free only when it urges to inspiration; it is only the pagan and decadent in art that is chained to earth. And the art that panders to the depraved, that holds up the malicious and the mean to be viewed, commented upon and applauded, falls off—and dies in its prime.

The pessimistic, the materialistic, the drama of avenging and pursuing fate—life without

hope or joy—are all to be found in our very modern drama, survival of that pre-Christian and pagan drama of Greece. But St. Francis, with his gladsome minstrelsy, with his belief in human nature and the part every one plays on the world's great stage; St. Francis, with a zest in the joy of life, sounded the first note in the Christian art of the theater; and in that self-same manner the author of these little plays has caught the lingering voice of that medieval and yet very modern dramatist, and sends forth these plays as St. Francis gave the message to the birds, to sing forth the joy of living, the hope in mankind, and the simple belief in God's goodness.

Father Lord does not believe in sad-faced, didactic and preachy religious drama, but a free and happy expression, and it is all fraught with a message.

For drama—like music and painting and sculpture and architecture—must come once more into our present life to be a sister art and servant in the household of religion.

CECILIA MARY YOUNG.

*Editor, "The Catholic Art-Theater
Series of Plays."*

Chicago, May 10, 1924.

PREFACE

AS THESE little plays were written for the most part to meet definite occasions, I should hesitate to offer them to a larger audience, were I not aware, from my own experience and from the constant flow of requests that reach me, of the dearth of material available for the amateur theater. There are plenty of "erotic, neurotic, and tommy-rotic" plays, but there are not so many suitable for directors and actors of more fastidious moral tastes.

So these little plays are offered to the ever-increasing body of play-readers and play-directors who limit their search to material that is clean and wholesome. But as the theater was never intended to be a classroom of ethics, these plays neither preach at you nor argue with you nor wave a pedagogical finger in your face.

All of them have been produced at various times during the past seven years, and all were written primarily to be presented by actors on a stage. But because play-reading has become almost as widely popular as play-going, I could not forego that appreciative audience whose

favorite theater is its own responsive imagination. Hence the plays have been cast into as readable a form as possible.

My grateful thanks are due to Miss Cecilia M. Young of Chicago, who produced some of the plays and who has showed so sympathetic an interest in them; to Webster College of St. Louis, in whose modern little theater three of the plays were first presented; and to Dr. Austin O'Malley, whose clever article, "Patricia not Brigid," first brought to my attention the ancient Irish legend on which "The Sight of the Blind" is based.

Slight as are these little plays, I cannot deny myself the pleasure of dedicating them to the thousands with whom I have worked during the years of my interest in Catholic dramatics and who make a treasured gallery of friendship. There are the dear associates of the St. Catherine Dramatic Club in Chicago, when at the same time I was working with fellow thespians (we preferred to call ourselves mummers) at Loyola University. There are the splendid young people who have produced in our Catholic colleges these little plays. There are the fine Catholic youths who gaily danced and sang through the Varsity musical comedies at St. Louis University. There are the hundreds of little children who have given me such tremen-

dous pleasure in their work. There are the thousands of happy faces that swirl about in my memory of the Pageants which have occupied my interest for the past five years. And there are the artists and directors into whose company I have been pleasantly thrown from the happy days at college down to the present when I count as my co-workers in the Pageant Movement the finest and most devoted fellow-laborers that ever gave their best to a cause. All these friends, made through mutual interest in Catholic dramatics, have given me some of the happiest hours of my life.

To them all, as to those who have tasted with me the joy and thrill of amateur dramatics, I affectionately inscribe this little book.

D. A. L.

Feast of the Holy Family, 1925.

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THE ROAD TO CONNAUGHT

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

NELL

MARK (*her brother*)

JOHN (*her husband*)

THE ROAD TO CONNAUGHT

(The scene is the living room of a small house in the Protestant plantation of Leinster. The room is unplastered, with plain but massive boards forming the walls, which are broken by two huge, rough doors on leathern hinges and by a single glazed window. No ornaments interfere with the grim plainness of the room, save a heavy musket which crosses a large cavalry saber just above the wide open hearth, and a royalist bugle, evidently a trophy, that hangs on the opposite wall. On a stand near the center of the room, but toward the back wall, is a massive, open Bible. The single table and the plain solid chairs are substantial without sign of comfort; yet there is about the room a permeating atmosphere of feminine care and thought. The chairs are not set at rigid angles, but are placed invitingly, some near the table, others close to the hearth; the table and the single hassock are covered with carefully knit cloths of intricate design, and a plain white curtain is draped at the little window.

(Evidently the home-like atmosphere is due to

the woman who is stirring a small pot that hangs in the open fireplace. She is young, not more than twenty-five, with dark hair and wide blue eyes, typically Irish in cast, slim of waist and deep of chest. Her face at present is reddened slightly by the heat of the crackling fire; normally she is rather pale, and there are marks of pensiveness and perhaps suppressed vitality in the single thin line that occasionally marks her white brow, and in the tight set to her rather full lips. She is clad in a plain, grey frock, relieved by a band of white at neck and wrists. A white starched cap rests lightly upon her hair.

(It is the winter of 1659. A bitter wind is lashing the countryside and sending the sparks in occasional showers over the hearthstones. A particularly shrill blast causes the woman to look apprehensively toward the window and into the gathering dusk of an early winter evening.

(Presently, satisfied with the contents of her pot, she removes it deftly to the hearthstone and goes to the cupboard whence she carries two metal platters and two deep mugs. These she places near the fire to warm. As she stoops, a man's figure appears for an instant at the window. He glances in almost furtively, his eyes moving rapidly above his heavy fleece collar.

From his angle he can catch only a glimpse of the woman near the fire before he passes on.

(A loud knock at the door brings the woman swiftly about, a half-smile of expectancy on her lips. But the knock is not repeated, and her smile fades as she realizes that it is not the signal she had expected. Slowly she moves toward the door, trembling slightly from cold as she passes the window.)

THE WOMAN: Who knocks?

A MAN'S VOICE: A shepherd strayed from his path in his search for a lost lamb.

THE WOMAN: *(after an instant's pause)* Whose shepherd are you?

THE MAN'S VOICE: The Lord of the Manor.

THE WOMAN: *(with a reassuring glance at the musket)* I have a musket at hand, unless you come in peace.

THE MAN'S VOICE: *(a touch of humor in his voice)* Your mercy, mistress, but the sight of your fire has made me as peaceful as a tabby on the hearth. In any case, I'd rather die a swift death from your musket than a slow one here from this killing cold.

(The woman hesitates, then impetuously flings up the heavy bar of the door and opens it sufficiently to allow the stranger to enter. A gust of wind accompanies him, sending the sparks whistling up the chimney. The woman

shuts the door behind him, leaning her whole strength upon it, and then rests against it watching him with mingled pity and suspicion.

(He is a tall, strongly built man, bundled to the ears in a great coat of sheep's wool. For a moment he sees only the fire and half stumbles across the room, his palms outstretched toward its glow.)

THE MAN: God's mercy on you, mistress! The glow of your fire is wine to my blood. My hands tremble like the hands of a palsied witch. Another mile, and I should have lost my precious nose.

(As he speaks, he is unwrapping the heavy cloth that holds his collar up about his face. This he now drops beside him on the hearth, standing revealed as a handsome, clean-cut Irishman, not more than two years the woman's senior, with sparkling eyes more than balanced by the unyielding firmness of his mouth. The woman stands with the light of the fire full in her face as he turns toward her for the first time with an elaborate, half jesting, wholly grateful bow.)

THE MAN: On the word of a shepherd, the tradesmen most beloved of God, you have my heart's deepest thankfulness. I beg . . .

(A sudden spurt of the flame lights up his profile. The woman's hand leaps to her heart,

and she staggers back a step, her terrified eyes riveted on the man's smiling face.)

THE WOMAN: *(in a horrified half-whisper)*
Mark!

(For the first time the man's eyes rest on the woman's face. A flush of joy leaps to his cheek. He springs across the intervening space and catches the sinking figure of the woman in his arms.)

THE MAN: Nell! My little sister, Nell!

(A moment he holds her, looking longingly into her face, while her frightened sobs alone break the silence. Then he speaks in a voice calm and soothing.)

MARK: My poor little sister! My lost lamb! Nell! . . . The shepherd has found the most precious lamb of his fold. Bless God for that! I've tramped Leinster from end to end searching for you. I've looked in at the maids in the dairies, praying you might be with them. I've watched the women as they came in from the fields, hoping that my eyes would single you out from their midst. Every spinning-wheel I heard seemed to promise that your hand was turning it. All in vain until tonight. My poor little lone lamb!

(A fresh gust of sobbing shakes the woman, and she struggles for an instant to free herself.)

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NELL: Don't, Mark! I'm not worth it; I'm not worth your search.

MARK: (*tenderly, and drawing her toward the fire*) My little sister, you are worth whatever it is in my power to give.

NELL: But in the face of all I've done . . .

MARK: I do not know what you have done. I never listened when men spoke. Persecuted men are bitter, cruel even toward their own. I've wanted to find you and let you speak for yourself. I've found you now; thank God and Mary for that!

(*The long pause is broken only by her sobs. He places her gently on the chair and kneels beside her.*)

MARK: When I returned from Valladolid, the holy oils still moist on my hands, and the strength of God's blessed Priesthood full upon me, I found that the worst had already been done. Munster and Leinster overrun by Cromwell's friends; Catholics and Irishmen driven from their homes to hell or Connaught, and only those left behind . . . who had married Cromwell's men and given up their Faith. It had been quick work, quick and complete. In a little cave in the hills of Connaught, I found our Mother and Father.

(*Nell checks her tears and turns all eagerness to him.*)

NELL: You come from them? They think of me at times?

MARK: (*bowing his head*) Often, sweet.

NELL: And always with hate for their daughter?

MARK: With pity and love; never with hate.

NELL: Thank God! Thank God! Mother is well and Father too?

MARK: (*almost bitterly*) War on women is an easy thing. Cromwell kills unarmed men with clubbed muskets, unarmed women with starvation. Our Father is waiting for you back there in Connaught. Our Mother led me through the cold to you tonight.

NELL: (*suddenly dry-eyed*) She is dead?

MARK: Thank God, the horror of it is over for her. Hers was the death of a martyr of God.

NELL: (*rising to her feet and speaking with bitter intensity*) A martyr! Sweet saints, a martyr! And I, her daughter, have not even a farewell kiss to cherish as a benediction from the dear saint. Oh, Mother, Mother, you die of starvation in Connaught, while I live on . . . in Leinster. Mark, dear Mark, is there hope of pardon for such as I?

(*Mark catches her by the arms and looks at her searchingly.*)

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MARK: This man, this minion of Cromwell . . . he married you?

NELL: (*suddenly defensive*) Oh, that at least.

MARK: He loves you?

NELL: (*lowering her head slowly*) He says little, but I know he does.

MARK: Has a baby come?

NELL: God has not blessed us.

MARK: (*in a quick burst of anguish*) Nell, why, why did you do this? Why did you fly from the persecution that should have fired your Irish blood? How could you have borne the thought of Mother and Father driven at the point of a saber into Connaught, while you remained behind? How could you give up the Faith you once clung to . . . all for this man?

(*Quietly Nell slips from his arms and lifts her head to face him.*)

NELL: Because, Mark, I love him.

Mark: (*scarcely comprehending*) Why I don't

. . .

NELL: I love him so much that for him I gave up home and family and Faith . . . and happiness.

MARK: (*still uncomprehending*) Happiness? What do you mean?

NELL: Yes, that most of all. Oh, don't you fancy that I have suffered? My woman's heart has known the anguish of Judas burning and

searing it night and day. I have built up my love out of treachery to my God and my people, and even love cannot make me forget that. For him I have thrown away my right to happiness.

MARK: (*his arms about her protectingly*) My poor little sister!

NELL: (*with a single dry sob*) And now Mother is dead. She can never say that she understands and forgives me.

MARK: She said that before she died.

NELL: (*a note of joy in her voice*) She did, Mark? She did?

MARK: She made me promise to look for you and bring you back to Father and to God. That is why I asked for the Leinster mission. (*Half whimsically.*) The spies are sharp in Leinster, and the roots and berries here make abominable diet. I was laid by the heels thrice, the last time just yesterday at Kilmainham. But the guard loved the sight of gold better than the sight of his prisoner, and I left him an empty cell to keep till morning.

NELL: Was it worth all that, Mark, to find me?

MARK: It was worth all the nights spent in the open, all the pangs of hunger and of loneliness to find the best, the dearest lamb of my flock. (*He takes her hands tenderly.*) And now we're going back the long road to God and

Father and Connaught, Nell. Ah, but how short the road will seem to, me. Come, Nell!

(As he speaks, there is the sharp crunch of a horse's hoofs in the snow. It has been growing rapidly louder but they have scarcely noticed it. Now they hear it, and their hands slip apart. Mark turns apprehensively, while Nell runs to the window and looks out into the dusk. When she turns from the window, her face is ashen.)

NELL: *(in a high, terrified whisper)* It is he. He must not even guess who you are. Quick; lie here near the hearth and seem to doze when he enters. Above all, he must not know you are a priest. I think . . . I think he might kill you.

(Even as she gives the commands, Mark flings himself at full length on the hearth and appears to doze, his head buried in his arms. Nell replaces the pot on the fire to rewarm and tries to grip her vibrating nerves. A sharp rap at the door, and she hurries to open it.

(Framed in the doorway stands her husband, a finely built man, stately under his forty odd years, hardened physically with service under the Protector and spiritually from contact with the Protector's creed. He is dressed with something of the trooper still in his attire; a large military cape is wrapped about him and a leath-

ern cap sets far down on his brow. He stands for a moment knocking the snow from his boots.

(Nell has slipped partially behind the door out of the way of the sweeping draft.)

NELL: Come in quickly, John. The wind is freezing me and ruining the fire completely.

(John enters, closes the door easily, and bends to kiss her with something like reverence in his manner.)

JOHN: It is a terrible evening, Nell, colder than ever I knew in York. The breath of my beast made an ice corslet for his chest. Thank God for a warm fire.

(Nell has taken the heavy cloak from his shoulders and hung it upon a peg to dry. John paces toward the fire, and then stops suddenly at sight of the recumbent form. He turns inquiringly toward Nell.)

JOHN: Who is this?

NELL: *(nervously working over the cloak)* A shepherd strayed from his path in search of his sheep.

JOHN: It is risky business, Nell, and you alone.

NELL: *(pleadingly)* I know, John; but it was so bitter out, and he so weary and cold, I hadn't the heart to refuse him shelter.

JOHN: *(bowing his head in grave assent)* Nor should I have had. Asleep?

NELL: (*evasively*) He was quite exhausted.

. . .

JOHN: Good! (*He looks at the stranger attentively, though he cannot see his face.*) A fine strapping sort of man, the girth of shoulders and thickness of wrist that Oliver would have loved to lead in a charge. A shepherd, you say?

NELL: (*busy at the table*) So he told me.

JOHN: (*thoughtfully*) Somewhere in this bitter night a skulking priest lies hiding, a man of this fellow's girth and stature. I saw him when the pursuivants brought him into Kilmainham, bound and bowed, but with untamed eyes and unquivering lips for all that. Last evening, they tell me, he escaped, the sly trickster. I wonder if this man . . .

NELL: (*the horror of it flashing upon her*) No, no! Not that!

(*John turns with obvious surprise in his glance. Nell resumes her work at the table feverishly, setting the dishes, placing the chairs in their positions, and covering her confusion with rapid chatter.*)

NELL: Come, sit down, John; I want to hear all the news from the village, and you promised to tell me all you heard. The meat is piping hot, and I've warmed the ale against the chill the weather has sent through your veins.

JOHN: (*half to himself, his eye once more on*

Mark) Such cold might drive even the foxes from their lairs.

NELL: (*running to him and laying her hand on his arm*) John, you aren't listening to me. Sit, I beg of you, or all my labor for your comfort will just be lost.

(*Yielding to her insistence, John crosses the room and seats himself moodily at the table. Nell keeps up her chatter all the while. She goes anxiously to the hearth where her platters have been warming, and when Mark stirs as if in his sleep, she stoops to whisper to him, but notices that her husband's eyes are upon them.*)

NELL: John, your coat sleeve is almost like ice. Wasn't it enough to freeze your marrow, riding against that terrible wind? (*Pouring out the steaming ale into two mugs.*) Here, drink this before you eat. Why, your poor hand is still trembling with the cold.

(*John raises the mug to his lips, his eyes still on the apparently sleeping stranger; and then without tasting the ale, he sets the cup emphatically on the table.*)

JOHN: The stranger must be cold too. He will eat and drink with us. (*In a loud voice.*) Shepherd!

(*Mark stirs and tosses uneasily. Nell seizes her husband's arm and presses him to turn.*)

NELL: No, no, John! Let him sleep. He is so tired and worn.

JOHN: (*almost kindly*) Nell, you were young when the Gospel light touched your soul. (*Nell shrinks involuntarily.*) You never learned the knavery of these priests. I more than half suspect that this shepherd . . .

NELL: But suppose it were so; would not the laws of hospitality—

JOHN (*roughly*) No laws bind for such as know no law. (*He turns and calls again.*) Shepherd! (*He strides over to him.*) Shepherd!

(*Mark stretches himself with a great affectation of sleep.*)

JOHN: There is meat and drink awaiting you as soon as you can shake off your drowsiness. Stand up, man. No guest of mine save him who has looked me square in the eye.

(*Mark rises slowly but with real dignity to his feet, fully prepared now to fight it out to the end. The two men face each other looking full into mutually hostile eyes.*)

MARK: My thanks, host! A lost shepherd like myself stands sorely in need of food and drink after his wanderings. And I have yet much to do this night.

(*John has been looking at him squarely and with growing contempt. Now he glances at Nell*

over his shoulder; she is standing with her hand pressed terror-stricken against her cheek.)

JOHN: (*in a voice of steel*) I suspected as much. It is the escaped felon. (*To Mark.*) Shepherd? You lied there, too. No shepherd you, but a popish priest!

MARK: (*simply but with conviction*) I am a shepherd like the Good Shepherd, and ready to lay down my life for the sheep the wolves have scattered.

JOHN: (*turning away contemptuously*) You shall have your chance. (*To Nell*) Nell, my cloak!

NELL: (*piteously*) What are you doing?

JOHN: (*incisively*) Taking him back to his felon's prison.

NELL: John, you must not; this is our home—

JOHN: Less place, then, for traitors.

NELL: John, I beg of you—

MARK: Let it be, Mistress. I thank you for your prayers though you hurl them at a rock. Perhaps my day is not yet come, despite your husband's making.

JOHN: That, the judges will decide.

NELL: John, listen to me! Let him go. You know what prison means for him . . . the rack, the thumbscrews, the galleys, perhaps the colonies.

JOHN: Fit punishment for traitors.

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MARK: Mistress, I beg of you—

NELL: John, (*as he strides toward his cloak*)
for my sake . . .

JOHN: (*turning abruptly*) For your sake?
What do you mean? Enough of this sentimentality. This man is a priest.

NELL: I know, and yet . . . John, I beg . . .

JOHN: (*coming to her*) For a priest you and I
can have no pity. . . . Why for your sake?

NELL: I . . .

JOHN: Well?

NELL: (*desperately*) In the old days . . . I, I
knew him.

JOHN: The old days are gone.

NELL: Yes, but he . . . he . . .

JOHN: Speak! Who is this man?

NELL: John, let him go! For my sake, let
him go!

JOHN: Who is this man who comes when I am
gone? Whom I must spare . . . for your sake.
(*Nell wrings her hands helplessly.*)

JOHN: Answer me! A neighbor?

NELL: No, John! He is . . . he is . . .

JOHN: (*suddenly seizing her wrists in an
agony of doubt*) Good God, Nell! He is not your
lover!

NELL: (*breaking away and throwing her arms
about Mark*) He is my brother.

(*There is a moment's pregnant pause. Mark*

slips his arm about her heaving shoulders and stands facing John calmly. John leans heavily against the table, blank astonishment in his eyes.)

JOHN: (*vaguely*) Your brother? I did not know . . .

MARK: We never crossed before. I was in Spain when you came.

JOHN: (*with renewed contempt*) In Spain; ah, plotting with England's and Ireland's foes.

MARK: (*almost angrily*) Plotting to save my countrymen from the tyranny and brutality of men like you and your thieving troops of—

NELL: (*wildly*) Mark, don't!

JOHN: (*imperiously to Nell*) Nell, come to me.

MARK: (*releasing her and stepping back a trifle*) I'll not speak out my mind to you. You are her husband and I think you love her.

JOHN: (*disregarding Mark utterly, and taking Nell's limp hand*) You loved me well enough to give up all this for me, did you not?

(*Nell bows her head silently.*)

JOHN: I do not know why this man, this priest, came into our home. But he cannot stay.

NELL: (*impulsively*) John . . .

JOHN: (*with fierce emphasis*) No priest, not even your brother, can remain beneath my roof, I could not risk the wrath of God.

NELL: John, please listen . . .

JOHN: (*turning sternly to Mark*) Your freedom shall not be touched. I cannot take her brother to death or to torture. You may go in safety. But if you return, I shall not promise as much again. Now go!

(*Mark does not move.*)

MARK: (*quietly*) Not without her.

(*John gazes fixedly and without comprehending.*)

JOHN: What did you say? . . .

MARK: Not without her. I have come to bring her back to her people and her God.

JOHN: (*releasing Nell's hand and walking toward Mark*) I could not have understood you rightly.

MARK: Perhaps not; how can I say? But let me be quite clear. I've tramped the length of Leinster, braving your pursuivants, living in your caves and stables, now in your filthy prisons, now in your rotten courts, hungry and lonely and dead from weariness, searching for my lost lamb. And now that I have found her, I am going to take her back with me to Connaught. Is that all quite clear now?

JOHN: You contemptible spy!

NELL: John . . .

JOHN: (*not heeding her*) You steal into my house disguised, like a thief or a felon. You come while I, her husband, am away, you with

your smooth Irish face and your oily Papist tongue to rob me of my wife . . .

MARK: You dare to speak of robbery? You who stole her from her Faith and her people? You who robbed us, already stripped of lands and liberty and God's blue sky, of our one lone lamb?

JOHN: She came with me willingly.

MARK: And she will go with me willingly or not at all.

JOHN: (*turning to Nell*) You have heard him? (*Nell bows her head.*)

JOHN: And you are silent?

(*She is motionless. John takes an agonized step forward.*)

JOHN: Good God! you couldn't . . . you are not thinking that . . .

(*He catches himself suddenly by a strong act of will and turns to Mark. His voice has grown almost tender.*)

JOHN: You say I stole her from you. Let her speak the truth. Nell, did I win you fairly as ever man won maid?

NELL: Yes, John. (*Going to Mark.*) Oh, Mark, Mark, you don't understand. There was more than love; there was gratitude to him for . . . what is more precious than life.

MARK: (*taking her hands*) Nell, what do you mean?

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NELL: (*shuddering*) When Drahedá fell, I was there.

(*Mark starts, and Nell covers her face with her hands.*)

MARK: I did not know.

NELL: I had gone to visit Cousin Margaret. We girls fled as the soldiers stormed the city and rushed through the streets. We fled madly, not knowing where to go. Oh, the unspeakable horror of it all. Men with glazed, open eyes lying in the mire and almost tripping us as we ran. Women wandering wildly through the streets praying for death. The clash of the soldiers and the horrid scream of the bugles! They found us, a brutal band in leather and steel. I cried for help, and their eyes were merciless. They seized me; I think I should have gone mad, when he came . . .

MARK: Merciful God!

NELL: . . . flinging the soldiers to right and left and fighting his way to me. He picked me up and carried me to safety. For three days he hid me and cared for me though it meant his head had he been found. And when the soldiers marched away, I promised him if ever he came for me, I would be his wife. (*A tense pause.*) Margaret I never saw again.

MARK: (*comprehending at last*) And when he came again . . .

NELL: I kept my word.

MARK: (*still caught with the horror of her possible fate*) I did not know; I never dreamed . . . (*To John.*) You are a brave man, sir; from the depths of a brother's heart, I thank you.

JOHN: Are you satisfied now? Will you go back to Connaught . . . alone?

MARK: No! You risked your life to save her body. I have risked my life for her soul. You fought your way through soldiers and perilled your head three days for her. I have walked in the midst of your spies and risked my head long months for her. My claim is stronger than yours. I claim her for God.

JOHN: (*to Nell*) You hear him?
(*Silence.*)

JOHN: Shall we answer him as man and wife?
(*Still silence.*)

JOHN: (*suddenly passionate*) You do not love me!

NELL: I do! A thousand times, I do!

JOHN: You have been happy here with me.
(*Silence.*)

JOHN: (*almost in agony*) You have . . . have you not?

NELL: Yes, yes . . . and no!

JOHN: (*horrified*) And no?

NELL: Oh, there have been moments, days when my heart seemed to split. I did not know what it would mean when I gave you my promise in Drahedra. I kept my promise, but our home has been built on treachery and lies. The shame of my desertion when I thought of my Mother and Father treading alone the bloody road to Connaught, the bitter anguish at thought that the daughter they trusted had forsaken them in the hour of their greatest need, the longing of my woman's heart for my betrayed Faith—

JOHN: You are a Protestant.

NELL: Not in truth. That was a lie lived for you.

JOHN: (*overwhelmed*) That too?

NELL: That too. As Protestant, I could stay with you; as Catholic, I must go. I chose to stay even at that cost.

JOHN: (*sinking into a chair*) Good God!

NELL: When I knelt beside you in the church, I loathed myself in the depths of my soul. The voice of your preacher railing at my Faith struck blood from my heart. The church where I had knelt to adore at the Mass you despised seemed to reel above my head. I felt as if the dear Jesus would strike me dead were I not so utterly, utterly contemptible.

MARK: (*coming to her*) He loves you too much ever to close His heart against you.

JOHN: It is the spell of priestly witchcraft in your soul.

NELL: No, no!

MARK: It is the compelling voice of Christ.

NELL: In the silence of the night, I could lie with dry throat and aching heart. The shadows cried, Traitress! My temples throbbed, Traitress! I could see my Father and Mother suffering off there in Connaught, suffering for Christ, and weeping in each other's arms for the daughter who had betrayed Him. I could have screamed in terror.

JOHN: You never told me.

NELL: You could not understand. At times I have stood near the clear lake longing to feel its waters closing over me in peace . . . but that would not bring peace.

(*They stand a silent, tense group. Mark speaks first.*)

MARK: Come, Nell! Together we are going back to Christ and our Father. In Connaught they are waiting for you.

JOHN: (*springing to his feet*) You shall not take her till she has spoken the final word. Nell, I offer you my heart, my home, my honor. This is a delusion, a trick of Satan. It will pass with

the passing of this man. It is priestly craft snaring your soul. You owe your life to me, remember; I offer you mine. You will not be happy without me, Nell.

NELL: I know it . . . but I have not been happy without Christ.

JOHN: Then you are going?

NELL: John, no other man shall ever claim my heart.

JOHN: (*suddenly freezing*) I ask you, are you going?

NELL: I must . . .

JOHN: Back to idolatry and papist superstition?

NELL: Back to Christ.

JOHN: (*turning to Mark, coldly*) Take her at once. My house is no place for papists.

NELL: (*in quick agony*) John, John, can't you see that this is breaking my heart?

(*He stands without heeding her.*)

NELL: Can't you see that my duty to God comes first?

(*He turns his back upon her, facing the fire. Nell, as if struck, falls back a step. Mark's arm is suddenly about her waist.*)

MARK: Come, Nell; it is bitter cold outside, but not so bitter as the heart of one that has loved.

(Nell stands for a moment with anguish in her face; then she goes slowly with Mark to where her cloak hangs. He takes it from the peg, while Nell slowly slips off her white cap and lays it on the table. Then he places the cloak gently about her and pulls the hood over her head. His heavy coat soon falls from his shoulders, and he stands ready for the road.)

MARK: *(at the door)* The moon is rising to light our way back to Connaught. Come, my sister.

NELL: *(still looking at John)* Good night, John.

(He does not turn.)

NELL: *(very softly)* In my heart you will always be my lover. Good night!

(Mark stands in the doorway while Nell passes silently out into the dusk. The door closes gently.)

(John does not move for a moment; then slowly he looks toward the door. With a sudden determination, he shakes off his mood, walks firmly to the window and pulls the curtain shut without even a glance into the night. He goes to the door and bolts it with a heavy bar. He then strides back to the table. As he does, his eye lights upon the white cap which rests there. Tenderly he picks it up, running it

through his fingers. With a sudden gesture he is about to crush it, but he pauses, and then slowly raises it to his lips. His lips quiver, and he falls to his knees with a mighty sob as

the scene closes.)

RAINBOW GOLD

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

WILL-O'-THE-WISP

AUREA

ARDORIS

DIVITAS

CUPIDO

THE LADY SUPERBA

GAUDIA

RAINBOW GOLD

(In spite of your surprise, you will recognize the place at once as The Land at the Rainbow's End. Out of the blue summer sky bends a brilliant rainbow that dips its head just behind a rose-bush in full bloom. You look closer, and there, under the bush and half embedded in the mold, you perceive a dull brass, earth-stained pot, carefully covered with a battered lid, but containing . . . oh, you know very well what it contains.

(Rainbow, rose-bush fairer than ever you saw before, brazen pot full of . . . well, very, very full at any rate; surely there must be . . . yes, there she is, dancing on the greensward with the sunlight that stains itself in its bath of rainbow gemming her filmy frock. You know at once that she is a fairy for she dances without the need of an audience, and she smiles with joyful spontaneity. The smile of dancing mortals is always cut out of solid oak.

(Just as she rises in a light pirouette a second figure darts up the slope leading to the little knoll and flings himself exhaustedly on the

grass. He is a tiny creature with a puckish face and lithe, active legs. His garments are a mottled mass of brilliant colors, and his cap glows even in the sunlight with a phosphorescent light. The dancing fairy stops midway and darts expectantly toward the panting figure; but as she approaches, he squirms himself into a sitting posture and waves his arms expansively.)

THE GAUDY FIGURE: They are coming, sweet Aurea. I passed them on the road, and they heeded me not one whit.

AUREA: (*in despair*) So dreadfully early? Oh, Will-o'-the-Wisp, I've scarcely danced one half my morning devotions.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Then you shouldn't have hung out the rainbow so soon.

AUREA: But it was so damp from last night's dew I simply had to dry it in the morning sunshine.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: (*leaping to his feet*) No matter! When the dwellers in towns and manors saw the rainbow shining at first dawn, they cried: "Hoho! We've a full day to reach the Rainbow's End!" And do you know, half of them promptly ordered gowns and palaces and milk-white steeds without so much as seeing the pot of gold!

AUREA: But, Will-o'-the-Wisp, when they ar-

rive, couldn't you lead them away for just a little? Please . . . at least until I've changed to something fit to appear in.

WILL-O'-THE WISP: (*severely*) Aurea, don't you know what your silly little vanity would cost?

AUREA: (*crestfallen*) I forgot.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: (*expansively*) It isn't as if I couldn't lead them away. Why, men have followed me to the world's end and then off; and as for the ladies, well, they come after me a-running. But to lead them off when they've found their way here, knowing all the while that no one finds the way a second time . . . Aurea, I just haven't the heart!

AUREA: (*with a sigh*) Then I suppose this simple morning dress will have to do.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: When one is beautiful as you are, the dress will always do.

(*A loud song, mellowed by distance, floats up from the valley. Aurea runs to the edge of the knoll and looks down.*)

AUREA: Oh! He is very handsome, isn't he?

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: As mere mortals go, fairly.

AUREA: I think I should like him to find the pot of gold.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: (*warningly*) No favorites, remember. He must find it and take it himself. Don't forget your rules.

AUREA: Oh, well . . .

(She skips back and dances daintily just before the rose-bush. Will-o'-the-Wisp dodges unobserved in the background. The song grows stronger and the voice fuller and fuller, until with an athletic bound, the singer leaps to the top of the mound.)

(He is a healthy, handsome fellow, a son of the merchant class, confident of himself, swaggering a bit in the fulness of his strength, and romantic with the romance of the troubadours. His very leap is confident, and his hose and beautifully embroidered tunic have a swagger that they learned from their wearer. He looks about him with a "Well, here I am; look at me!" air, that drops from him momentarily as he catches sight of Aurea. In an instant he has whisked off his cap with its sweeping plume.)

THE YOUTH: *(surprised and delighted)* Oh!

(Aurea smiles but says nothing.)

THE YOUTH: I beg your pardon . . . I had no idea that it was so short a way to the Rainbow's End . . . I thought I would be the first there. . . .

AUREA: You are the first.

THE YOUTH: *(flinging his cap into the air)* I am? Hurrah! Isn't that luck? My fortune's made . . . Eh, my name is Ardoris. I'm from the village back there; you can see it shining in

the sun. Really it is much larger than it looks from here. My father is the chief burgher; a merchant prince, the neighbors call him.

AUREA: I'm Aurea.

ARDORIS: Oh! Do you live near here?

AUREA: Oh, yes; and have . . . for years.

ARDORIS: Isn't it odd I never saw you before. I thought I knew all the pretty girls. And you dance so daintily!

AUREA: I love to dance!

ARDORIS: Then, why haven't you ever come to our May-pole?

AUREA: No one ever asked me.

ARDORIS: (*impulsively*) I do. Won't you come? I'll crown you May-Queen if I have to fight every youth in the village.

AUREA: But really, you know so little about me.

ARDORIS: (*rising to the occasion*) I know a great deal. I know that your eyes are deep wells in which the starlight sparkles and glows, that your hair is a waterfall turned by a fairy touch into a cascade of rippling gold, that your voice is the music of the south-wind through pines and hemlocks, that you are the whiteness of the snow, the glory of the dawning, the grace of the fawn, the sweetness of crushed peaches, the scent of the woods under the rising sun, all this and more made woman.

AUREA: (*trying to act impressed*) Oh! You read poetry.

ARDORIS: (*hurt*) I write it.

AUREA: (*playfully*) Did she like it when you practiced it on her.

ARDORIS: (*not understanding*) Why, she . . . (*Then offended.*) I never repeat my lyrics.

AUREA: Forgive me. It was so beautiful I thought it could not have been improvised.

ARDORIS: With a subject like you for my muse . . .

AUREA: (*hurriedly*) But aren't you forgetting what you—

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: (*warningly*) Play fair! Play fair!

ARDORIS: (*perceiving only a faint glow*) What is that glowing over there?

AUREA: Will-o'-the-Wisp.

ARDORIS: Oh . . . Won't you sit here with me for a while? I should like it so much. (*Aurea takes his hand and seats herself. He flings himself at her feet and pulls from his tunic a bundle of papers.*) May I read you my poetry?

AUREA: I should love it.

ARDORIS: I've one here to a maiden's hair . . . but hers was black.

AUREA: Haven't you one to golden hair? (*She strongly stresses the "golden."*)

WILL-O'-THE WISP: Not fair! Not fair!

AUREA: (*over her shoulder*) There's no rule that says I may not talk about my hair.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Then accent the hair, not the golden.

ARDORIS: I've another here, To My Love. I'll have to revise that now.

AUREA: (*innocently*) Why?

ARDORIS: (*ardently*) Because until now I never had a love. (*He takes her hand.*) Aurea, you are so fair, that beside you this rose-bush withers and dies from shame. Listen to me, my sweet Aurea. You are too delicate to walk the long way back with me, but in my stables I've the fleetest horse in the countryside; he can carry you and me like the down of thistles caught in his saddle . . . and carry us he shall. (*He leaps to his feet.*) I'm off to get him, and when I return—

AUREA: (*frightened*) Oh, but you mustn't!

ARDORIS: (*masterfully*) Why mustn't I? Do you dislike me, find me ill-favored, misshapen, miserly of purse, small of wit?

AUREA: No. . . .

ARDORIS: And you are the only one the broad world holds that I want. I'll be back—

AUREA: But are you sure—

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Take care! Take care!

AUREA: —that you can find your way back again?

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Not fair! Against the rules!

ARDORIS: (*laughing*) Why, I climbed hither in a single hour. How long, do you think, it would take my steed to whisk me back when at the journey's end my sweetheart is waiting?

AUREA: But you did not come for her; you came . . .

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: You're cheating, cheating, cheating!

ARDORIS: (*vaguely remembering*) I came because . . . (*then triumphantly*) because I was to find my Aurea. Farewell, sweetheart, for the longest of hours made short by the joy of meeting.

(*He kisses her hand and dashes off while Aurea stands following him with eyes slightly filmed with mist. Will-o'-the-Wisp bounds forward.*)

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: You see? Cheaters never prosper, as I've heard mortal children shout in the village streets.

AUREA: (*wistfully*) He was very lovely.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: And a silly dullard. For a pair of bright eyes and a cascade of golden hair, he forgot his pot of gold.

AUREA: (*stamping her foot*) It was very sweet of him. I like him for it.

RAINBOW GOLD

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: (*mockingly*)

When mortal lovers fairies woo,
The Goblins cry, Boohoo! Boohoo!

(*Aurea turns away in a swift tempest of rage, but up from the valley comes a loud grumble, a puffing and heavy panting.*)

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Hoho! Here comes a pair, with a century and a half split evenly between them, and a race on like the race between battered ships in a gale.

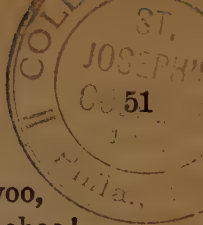
(*As he speaks, a portly gentleman thumps rapidly in, his face, red from exertion, contrasting vividly with his age-whitened hair. For all his years, he beats the ground firmly with his cane and wears his fine gown with an air of conscious dignity. As he spies the waiting Aurea, he fixes her with a hard, unblinking eye.*)

THE OLD MAN: Is this the Land at the Rainbow's End?

AUREA: (*unsmiling*) Well, what would your eyes say to that?

THE OLD MAN: (*snorting*) No free information, I see. I doubt if you know yourself . . . wax doll! Well, my young lady, I happen to know that it is, do you see? Old Divitas hasn't been fooled yet where money was concerned, and he won't be this time either.

(*Will-o'-the-Wisp laughs derisively.*)



DIVITAS: Who the devil dared to laugh? What's that thing glowing over there?

AUREA: Will-o'-the-Wisp.

DIVITAS: (*with a chuckle*) Catch old Divitas following a will-o'-the-wisp. Now that poor fool of a doddering Cupido, he'd follow a bright bubble till it swamped him in a quagmire. Hoho! Won't the old idiot rage? I'm first to the pot of gold . . . (*Suddenly anxious.*) I am first, am I not?

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Not by much. Here comes old Cupido now!

DIVITAS: (*to Aurea*) Who spoke? It wasn't you. (*Tottering to the edge of the knoll, he looks down the slope.*) There he is, the avaricious old miser, God rot him! (*He fumbles in his purse and then holds out to Aurea a coin.*) Here, my pretty girl, is a bright new penny. Now show me the pot of gold before he comes.

AUREA: (*drawing back in disgust*) No!

DIVITAS: (*wheedlingly*) Oh, I see, my sweet young lady—you are a sweet young lady, with hair like gold—I love hair like gold—I see you know the value of money. Here is a ducat. Do you know how many bright ribbons a ducat will buy? Enough to tie the hearts of half the youths in yonder valley to your trim little gir-dle. Come, take the ducat and show me the gold.

(Aurea contemptuously slaps the gold from his hand, and turns away toward the laughing Will-o'-the-Wisp. Divitas stands purple with rage, his stick vibrating in his hand and his voice shaking.)

DIVITAS: A plague spoil your fair face till your hair drops from your head and your teeth crumble in your sagging lips. Where's my ducat? *(He feels around in the grass with his stick.)* My ducat is gone.

(As he prods around in the grass, the thumping cane of Cupido dully striking the sod arouses his attention. He turns quickly with fear and anger fighting for mastery. Then a sudden inspiration lights his emotion-torn face. He flings himself on the grass and begins a doleful moaning. When Cupido enters he sees Divitas rocking to and fro in the grass, the picture of utter despair.)

(Cupido is a lean, dank person with wet hair and fingers that open and close incessantly. His long cloak is patched and his tunic is threadbare at the elbows. He stands staring at Divitas in utter wrath.)

CUPIDO: So you got here first, you sleek, oily, old pirate.

(Divitas groans lugubriously in reply. A lean, watery smile runs along the creases of Cupido's cruel face.)

CUPIDO: What's wrong, you purple-livered rascal? Are you suddenly ill? Can't you go further in your search?

DIVITAS: (*groaning and ignoring him*) Too late! Too late!

CUPIDO: (*fear drying up his smile*) Too late? What do you mean?

(*He hobbles over to Divitas and shakes his arm. Divitas looks up and pretends to see him for the first time.*)

DIVITAS: You here too, Cupido? Alas, my friend, we are in the same sad fix.

CUPIDO: (*shaking him impatiently*) Stop this maundering; speak up, you sneaking old cut-throat. What ill luck has befallen you that you call me your friend?

DIVITAS: The pot of gold is gone; a villain was here before us.

CUPIDO: Gone?

(*Divitas groans anew. Cupido sinks on the grass beside his rival, and they rock together in pitiful rhythm.*)

CUPIDO: How do you know? How did it happen?

DIVITAS: Oh, my poor heart is broken. As I climbed the hill, struggling along on my weary limbs, three stalwart, robust youths flew by me on the run. What could I do? I flung my stick after them. I called them sweet names. I of-

ferred to make them my heirs. They laughed and ran the faster. And when I reached the Rainbow's End, I met them swinging along, a song on their lips and laughter in their eyes, and our gold, our precious pot of gold, swung from the arm of the tallest; and there was nothing left but the rose-bush, the evil spirits wither it!

(They groan once more in chorus.)

DIVITAS: Alas our gold, our beautiful gold.

CUPIDO: *(greedily)* You say our gold? Why "ours"?

DIVITAS: *(hypocritically)* Because would I fail to share with my friend?

CUPIDO: With me?

DIVITAS: With you!

CUPIDO: How beautiful is friendship.

DIVITAS: How beautiful is our lost gold.

(As they groan together in horrible dissonance, Will-o'-the-Wisp darts across their vision with a boisterous, derisive laugh.)

CUPIDO: What was that?

DIVITAS: A will-o'-the-wisp.

CUPIDO: *(moaning)* I have followed a will-o'-the-wisp.

DIVITAS: And I, too!

(Aurea comes forward, her eyes snapping. Divitas sees her and becomes instantly terror-stricken. He holds out his hand pleading for silence.)

CUPIDO: Who is that?

DIVITAS: (*fawning*) A beautiful girl who is kind to old men and keeps their secrets. (*He detaches his purse from his girdle and holds it out to her.*) Here, beautiful maid, is something to remind you of two sorrowful old men. Silence is golden, my dear, remember that.

CUPIDO: (*snatching the money from Divitas's hand*) What ails you, you simpering old fool? Can a pretty face rob you at your age of hard, cold, glittering gold? Go, girl, before I have the public executioner whip your shamelessness from a cart's tail.

AUREA: This wretched old miser—

CUPIDO: Silence, or I'll lay my cane on your shoulders!

(*Aurea flies quickly backwards.*)

CUPIDO: (*looking into purse*) You old fool! Gold thrown about like rose-leaves!

DIVITAS: Give me back my purse.

CUPIDO: I will when you are beyond the range of bright eyes. Fools are more fool than ever when their hair is white. Come, let us go. Oh, our beautiful gold.

DIVITAS: Oh, our beautiful gold.

(*They groan in concert.*)

DIVITAS: Yes, let us go. There is money still to be made in the world, my friend; and we are young.

CUPIDO: Yes, very young. I will go first, for I carry the purse. Oh, our lost gold! Our beautiful gold!

(He goes out groaning. Divitas follows him slowly, but as he reaches the edge of the knoll, he turns to Aurea, his face glowing with triumph.)

DIVITAS: I shall return. Let none touch the gold till I return! *(In triumph.)* Oh, my beautiful gold! My beautiful gold!

(He disappears down the hill.)

AUREA: *(in quick wrath)* Beasts! Loathsome toads!

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Hoho! Wasn't it funny? Wasn't it a sight to tickle the ribs of mighty Jove? *(Imitatingly.)* Oh, our beautiful gold! Our beautiful gold! Hoho! But look! A fair dame comes this way. By all the goblins of the seven oaks, she has the stride of a countess, no less. *(Mockingly.)* Make way for her ladyship! Dust with your hats the path of our precious countess! Hoho! Hoho!

(Unconsciously Aurea smooths her frock and pats her hair, as the tall, majestic lady sweeps up the slope. She is not beautiful, but she has a commanding poise and her dress is in exquisite care and taste. Her manner, though, tingles with frost, and her voice seems to come from afar.)

THE LADY: So this is the Rainbow's End. *(She surveys the place with lofty disapproval. Then she turns and regards Aurea remotely.)* Are you the attendant here?

AUREA: *(bristling with offended vanity)* Were you speaking that way to me?

THE LADY: Obviously: I have no servants with me.

AUREA: *(scarcely able to speak)* I am not a servant.

THE LADY: *(loftily)* Pardon me. It was a natural mistake.

(Aurea stamps her foot furiously. Will-o'-the-Wisp laughs delightedly as Aurea's face pinks with rage.)

THE LADY: *(turning in his direction)* What is that glowing over there?

AUREA: Will-o'-the-Wisp.

THE LADY: *(turning away coldly)* I've heard he has a common following.

(Will-o'-the-Wisp's laugh dies, and Aurea makes a spiteful face at him.)

THE LADY: I am the Lady Superba. You've heard of me?

AUREA: *(maliciously)* Never.

THE LADY SUPERBA: Everyone that really matters has. My husband is the Lord Mayor of our city, you know. Usually I travel in a coach and four with two outriders and lackeys before

and behind. I suppose after today, walking will be quite a fad in our portion of the country. Fads usually start with some quite unintended action of mine.

AUREA: I can see no reason why they should.

THE LADY SUPERBA: What did you say? Your articulation is wretched; it could have been vastly improved with a little cultivation . . . Show me the pot of gold, please. I've a luncheon with the Countess de Urbe—of course you don't know her—and the Countess is the soul of promptness.

AUREA: Find it for yourself! I've a fairy queen invited to dine with me and it would hardly do to keep her waiting.

THE LADY SUPERBA: (*with an icy laugh*) My dear, never ape your betters!

(*Aurea turns away hot with anger and hurt pride. The Lady Superba surveys the place calmly and then walks over to the rose-bush.*)

THE LADY SUPERBA: Dreadfully common roses for the Land at the Rainbow's End. I've a bush in my garden . . . really, it would surprise you just to see how beautiful roses can become with proper cultivation. My gardener, a clever fellow, called this rose the Lady Superba.

AUREA: The rose must have wilted when it saw its namesake.

THE LADY SUPERBA: It did,—from envy.

(Calmly she walks around the bush until she comes to the pot. She eyes it with evident disapproval, and then, gingerly holding her skirts away from contact with it, pushes the lid aside with her foot.)

THE LADY SUPERBA: What cheap, ill-cared-for plate! I shall have to order my third scullion to polish it. The gold, too, looks very old and rather tainted, I should say. Heaven knows how it was made. Still, gold is gold, I suppose, even when musty and lusterless. Girl . . . Girl!

(Aurea ignores her pointedly.)

THE LADY SUPERBA: I am calling you, young person.

AUREA: I am not a young person: I am a fairy; and what is more, I was ages old before you were born.

THE LADY SUPERBA: Were you really? I was sure from the first that your complexion couldn't be natural. However, I suppose you are in charge of these matters, aren't you? Kindly have some one of your fellow fairies—or do you call your servant-class gnomes?—carry this pot of gold behind me to my manor.

AUREA: *(seeing her chance)* You may carry the pot for yourself, my lady. Fairies wait on no one.

THE LADY SUPERBA: Indeed? Well-bred persons are glad of a chance to wait on the Lady Superba! As for carrying it myself, how utterly droll! Fancy me walking through town like a common peasant woman with a pot of gold on my arm.

AUREA: Do peasant women, as a rule, carry pots of gold?

THE LADY SUPERBA: I never trouble myself with what peasant women do.

(She stoops to pick up the pot, but the rust of the handle soils her hands. She draws back with an exaggerated shudder.)

THE LADY SUPERBA: The handle is so dirty one hesitates to touch it.

AUREA: *(with a thrust home)* So you are going to carry it after all—like a common peasant woman.

THE LADY SUPERBA: *(ignoring the remark, but suiting her future conduct forthwith)* Fairies must be wretched housekeepers. One cannot touch their things without soiling one's hands. However when one has servants as I have . . . Be good enough, young, or rather, old person, should anyone come for the pot of gold in my absence, to say that it belongs to the Lady Superba. Everyone will recognize the name. I shall return in an hour with a retinue of lackeys to carry the gold behind me. When one is accus-

tomed to wait on oneself as you are, one cannot appreciate how abhorrent to a delicate nature is the least menial task.

(The Lady Superba sweeps out with her head high in the air, leaving Aurea quite speechless. Will-o'-the-Wisp dances forward.)

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Hoho! my sweet Aurea! She pricked your pretty vanity in a hundred places.

AUREA: *(almost in tears)* She is a lizard, a snake, a cat with claws! And you . . . you have a common following.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: A following is a following even when it smells and is covered with mud. But look, another approaches, a pretty child who stops to chase a butterfly. Come hither, little one, hither, hither, hither.

(A large butterfly, his wings dyed a thousand hues, flutters across the greensward and hides itself in the gem-like beauty of the rainbow. In its wake trots a bright-haired child, a little girl so young that wonder still holds wide her eyes and a smile quite without a hint of malice plays gay hide and seek in the dimples of her cheek. When she sees Aurea, she runs straight to her and holds out her hand.)

THE CHILD: Oh, you are a fairy.

AUREA: *(smiling, in spite of her late wrath)* Yes, my dear.

THE CHILD: I love fairies; they are all so sweet. I'm Gaudia and I've travelled miles and miles to find the Rainbow's End.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: How long is miles and miles?

GAUDIA: (*seeing him for the first time*) Oh, there is Will-o'-the-Wisp! How do you do? (*She curtsies.*)

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: How do you do? Come, now, how long is miles and miles?

GAUDIA: Long enough to sing all the songs I know twice over, to say all my prayers three times, to feel hungry and stop to pick blueberries four times, or just as long as a butterfly can sail on a summer's day. Did you see my butterfly?

AUREA: Was that yours?

GAUDIA: All mine, for I let him go when, by snatching quick, I could have caught him a dozen times. Do you know, I think he must be just a little piece broken loose from your rainbow. It is your rainbow, isn't it?

AUREA: Yes, my dear.

GAUDIA: It is pretty . . . but not as pretty as you. Oh, what a beautiful rose-bush! (*She runs to it and buries her face in a blossom.*) Don't you love to wash your face in perfume? Do you live here all the while?

AUREA: Yes, my sweet.

GAUDIA: I should love to live at the Rainbow's End. May I gather some of your roses?

AUREA: As many as you can carry. Let me help.

GAUDIA: Thank you so much!

(Aurea piles the child's arms full of roses until she stands with her face framed in a great bouquet.)

AUREA: *(stepping back)* There . . . a flower in a great bowl of roses.

GAUDIA: *(ecstatically)* Oh, I'm just too happy . . . I could dance. May a mortal child dance with a fairy?

AUREA: *(holding out her hand)* Let's!

(Aurea whisks her up in a whirlwind dance, while Will-o'-the-Wisp flings himself in a gay caper about them. Then quite abruptly Gaudia pauses.)

GAUDIA: Oh, I almost forgot!

AUREA: Forgot what, my dear?

GAUDIA: What I came for, of course; you know, the lovely pot of gold.

AUREA: Oh!

GAUDIA: Where is it?

AUREA: I mustn't tell.

GAUDIA: Is it a game? If it is, I'll find it just as quick! Watch me and tell me when I'm right.

(She darts off, still hugging her roses. As

she runs about, peering hither and thither, Will-o'-the-Wisp keeps calling after her.)

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Warm, warmer, hot, cold, quite freezing!

GAUDIA: (*stopping suddenly*) What does hot mean, that I'm near the gold, and cold that I'm far away?

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Sometimes one thing and sometimes another.

GAUDIA: That's not a fair game . . . Still, I'll get it; just you wait.

(She darts behind the rose-bush and stops abruptly, her face bent delightedly over the pot of gold.)

GAUDIA: Oh, I've found it.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: She's found it. She's cold! She's cold!

GAUDIA: It's hot when one has found the thing.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Not when one has found gold.

(Gaudia leans far over it, still clasping her roses to her heart; and then looks back at Aurea, who is close behind her.)

GAUDIA: It really isn't very pretty, is it? It doesn't shine.

AUREA: It is dull with tears and sweat and the breath of sighs.

GAUDIA: My roses are very much prettier, don't you think so?

AUREA: Very much.

GAUDIA: Still . . . Must I carry it away myself?

AUREA: Yes.

GAUDIA: But who will carry my roses? I can't take both.

AUREA: No, my pretty dear.

GAUDIA: Must I leave either the roses or the gold?

AUREA: Yes.

GAUDIA: (*dolefully*) Oh . . . (*Then brightly.*) I know. The roses will fade, but the gold will keep, I want my roses while they are sweet and fresh. I'll take them back with me; and then, when I'm big, and a fine young man comes to love me, I'll take him by the hand and bring him back with me to find my pot of gold. Isn't that an idea?

AUREA: The fine young man has better than a pot of gold who wins your love, sweet Gaudia.

GAUDIA: Do you think so? Oh, thank you!! Well, that's fixed. I'm off again. Where's my butterfly? I know; he's dissolved again in your rainbow. Or maybe when evening comes, he soaks himself in the colors of the rainbow for another day. May I kiss you, fairy Aurea?

(*Aurea kisses her tenderly.*)

GAUDIA: I'll shake hands with you, Will-o'-the-Wisp, if you wish. Please don't muss my roses.

(They shake hands solemnly.)

GAUDIA: Good-by. You have been very sweet to me. I'll be back when I'm a big girl, and I'll say: "I'm Gaudia." Will you remember me?

AUREA and WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Yes, indeed.

GAUDIA: *(shyly)* And I hope you will like my fine young man. Good-by. Give my love to my butterfly tomorrow, please.

(She runs off, hugging her roses. Aurea looks after her with a smile.)

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: A sweet child, a dear child, a lovely child!

AUREA: And wise.

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Wise as only a child is wise.

AUREA: Heigh-ho! Another day . . .

WILL-O'-THE-WISP: And time to pull in the rainbow.

(Aurea begins a slow, mystic dance, and as she moves about, the rainbow fades swiftly from the sky. With the fading of the rainbow, dark shadows sheath the Land at the Rainbow's End. There is a moment's silence, and then indistinct voices rise from the valley, growing occasionally clearer and more articulate.)

THE VOICE OF ARDORIS: *(calling)* Aurea, my

sweet Aurea! Sweetheart, where are you? I've brought my swift steed with a pillion behind. The wedding feast smokes on the board, and the guests await the bride. Aurea, it is I, Ardoris! And sweetheart! I remember now what I came to the Rainbow's End to seek . . . a pot of gold. We'll take it back with us to the feast; it will be your dower. (*His voice grows gradually fainter until it dies away.*) Aurea, my Aurea! Where are you?

THE VOICE OF DIVITAS: (*moaning*) Oh, my beautiful gold! I've lost my way. Poor Cupido sits by his fireside moaning his loss, while I, who was so sure, I cannot find the way. The rainbow is faded, and I cannot see. Pretty girl! Listen to me! I've another purse, fatter than the last, and Cupido is not here to snatch it from you. Help me find my gold. (*His voice, too, fades into silence.*) Oh, my beautiful gold! My beautiful lost gold!

THE VOICE OF THE LADY SUPERBA: (*in haughty rage*) It must be here, I say. Drive straight ahead, coachman! Crack your whip over that outrider's shoulders. Such blockheads! Such dolts! Afraid of the darkness! Drive through it; I tell you I know the way. Stay close beside the coach, you lazy lackeys! I shall need you to carry that pot of gold. I must show that fairy how many servants wait on The Lady Superba.

(*Her voice dies away.*) Drive straight ahead, straight ahead, I say, you precious knaves.

THE VOICE OF GAUDIA: (*singing through the dark*) Oh, how beautifully my roses glow through the dusk; they are like great red balls of fire. I love them better than gold; better than . . . no, I shall love my fine young man better still. Perhaps I shan't tell him of the pot of gold . . . he might love it better than me. Good-by, fairy Aurea! I shall come back to you again. (*Her voice fades.*) Thank you so much for your roses. Good-by, Will-o'-the-Wisp! Good-by, Aurea.

THE VOICE OF WILL-O'-THE-WISP: (*mocking*) They've lost their way. Hoho! Hoho! Follow me, travellers, follow me to the Rainbow's End!

THE VOICE OF AUREA: (*pensive*) I wonder . . .

THE VOICE OF WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Well, life is all a long wonder.

THE VOICE OF AUREA: . . . if some day, some person from the world of men will come . . .

THE VOICE OF WILL-O'-THE-WISP: How long have they been a-coming?

THE VOICE OF AUREA: Since the world's first dawning.

THE VOICE OF WILL-O'-THE-WISP: Hoho! Hoho!

THE VOICE OF AUREA: And yet, perhaps . . .

(*The scene closes.*)

THE SIGHT OF THE BLIND

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

DARA (*A Nun*)

BRIGID (*A Nun*)

A THIRD NUN

A BARD

THE SIGHT OF THE BLIND

(The scene is the quiet garden of an Irish Convent in the days when the memory of St. Patrick was still as green as Ireland's fields. On the right, the wall of the convent rises, solid and round arched, and throwing forward a single broad flight of stairs which leads up to the heavy, brass-studded oaken door. The window to the right of the door is narrow and stained red with a heavy carmine cross.)

(A long, broad, covered walk runs across the rear of the convent garden and through its heavy stone arches one can look out into the orchard beyond. The wall which bounds the orchard extends itself along the left of the garden where it is broken by a double-door gate once more of brass-studded wood, its beautifully wrought hinges spreading like an exposed root over the firm wood. In the center of the garden rises a tall yew tree which brushes on one side the second story of the convent, and on the other flings a few venturesome branches over the garden wall. In its shade stand a number of plain chairs with woven seats, and a small but heavy

round table. Several rather small, half-finished tapestries lie on the table, dropped as if in obedience to a sudden bell. A distaff covered with wool rests on a chair. These evident signs of feminine handicraft not more than the carefully trimmed ivy that clings to the yew and the climber roses beneath the convent window mark this as the abode of women. The beautifully illumined parchment gospels on the table marks them for religious women.

(There is a moment of deep, peaceful silence, and then a gong within the convent rings out a solemn, resonant note, which is enveloped rather than lost in the sound of a choir of women's voices chanting the Magnificat. The canticle dies at last into the same peaceful silence, and then the door of the convent swings gently open.

(A nun habited in white lamb's wool with a veil of lighter material draped from her forehead stands for a moment hesitating in the doorway. Her face is lifted gratefully to the fresh wind from the garden. Then turning, she closes the door and moves swiftly down the low stairs, her hand slightly extended before her. At the foot of the steps she veers to the right and stoops to gather in her hands the full flowers of the climber roses. She lays them for a moment against her young, fresh cheek.

(Then with the same almost gliding motion, one hand still held before, her palm downward and fingers slightly spread, she crosses to the table where she pauses once more. Lightly her hand moves over the tapestries, touches the gospels reverently, and then from the chair picks up her distaff. With an instinctive grace of carriage she seats herself in one of the chairs and her fingers mechanically busy themselves in the wool. She is facing out now, and one can see that hers is a fair, vibrant young face, whose dark, arching eyebrows contrast almost vividly with the calm whiteness of her complexion, and whose small red lips are parted in an expectant smile. But the eyes that look out from the vital face are fixed and expressionless; for the soul of the nun is closed in a cell of perpetual darkness. She is blind.)

(The convent door opens again and an older woman identical in her habit enters. She pauses for a moment to watch the nun beneath the tree, and then takes a cautious step toward her.)

THE YOUNG NUN: *(very softly)* I'm glad you've come, Mother Brigid.

THE OLDER NUN: *(dropping her caution and coming toward her)* My dear Dara, how did you know it was I?

DARA: *(smiling and holding out her hand)*
As if you could hide your presence from me!

When you come, the air seems warmer and more tender; I can feel the roses flinging handfuls of scent to welcome you; and the sweetness of your smile wings its way straight to my heart.

BRIGID: (*kisses her and drops into a chair at her side*) Yet men call you blind!

DARA: And I call them blind. My eyes are closed, but my soul sees. Their eyes see, but their souls are closed to light. Come, Mother dear; tell me all the news.

BRIGID: First of all, a sweet Sister Dara, blessed with the sight of blindness, is to take her Vows tomorrow.

DARA: (*accepting the playful tone*) Really? Who found such a poor, weak girl worthy of that?

BRIGID: The dear Christ who loves the poor and cherishes the weak, and Brigid who loves the girl.

DARA: (*no longer playful, and dropping her distaff in her lap*) I'm happy, oh, blissfully happy! Tomorrow is the day of my espousal to the dear Christ! I've dreamed of it by days and wept by nights from fear it might not come true. . . . And then?

BRIGID: At holy Mass this morning, our saintly chaplain shed tears when he held the dear Jesus in his hands.

DARA: Is that strange? Talk to me of Mass.

BRIGID: Fancy the altar, calm, white, stately, yet hiding in its crannies the sweetest flowers of our garden; fancy the priest as he stands there in his long enveloping vestments wrought from the purest linen threads by your hands, Dara, and the hands of the nuns, our Sisters, and woven into the triumphant symbol of our redemption; fancy the moment when high above his head, like the pale, white moon o'er the peaks of the mountain, the round Host is lifted in consecrated hands, and looking upward we see God with us—that, Dara, is Mass.

DARA: (*leaning forward eagerly*) Ah, Mother, you see less than your blind Dara. Listen! I knelt at Mass, and my soul saw hosts of angels swinging vast censers filled with the quintessence of the rose and the hyacinth and the jasmine. I saw tiny cherubs elbowing one another in their eagerness to be near the Christ who was to come, and seraphs holding the illumined scrolls from which they were to chant the praises of their Love. I saw a long road, paved with gold and flecked with star dust, that ran upward toward gates of beaten brass. Then the gates were thrown wide, and down the long road He glided, His hands outstretched to me, His eyes smiling into the depths of my soul. No flowers, no priest, no concealing Host shrouded

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Him from my vision. I looked straight up into the sweet face of Christ. That, Mother dear, is Mass.

BRIGID: My child you see best of us all.

(She rises and walks to the climber roses.)

DARA: But, Mother dear, more news!

BRIGID: *(picking a large, red rose)* The climber roses here under the window are in bloom.

DARA: I know. They called to me and kissed me when I entered the garden. Their perfume must be like the scent of His breath.

(Brigid places the rose for an instant to her nostrils, casts her eyes momentarily up to Heaven, and then returns to Dara.)

BRIGID: Sister Columba has more than half finished her tapestry.

DARA: The tapestry of Our Lady with Jesus in the manger?

BRIGID: Yes. It is exquisite. The threads of the background are red—

DARA: Red is the color of His love!

BRIGID: The weave of Our Lady's mantle is blue—

DARA: Blue is the color of her thoughts!

BRIGID: The child is wrapped in the purest white—

DARA: White is the color of His beloved's soul!

BRIGID: But you have never seen a color; how can you know all that?

DARA: (*leaning forward, her cheek rested thoughtfully in her palm*) They tell me the world is very beautiful, Mother dear; so beautiful that men fall in love with it and forget Him that made it. Is that true?

BRIGID: God pity us, yes!

DARA: Then perhaps, had I seen colors, I should know them for themselves and not for what they mean to me now. I cannot see their beauty, but I can see instead the beauty of Him that made them. They are the poor little images of His loveliness, and now the image can never turn my thought from Him they reflect. I love the touch of wool; it is like His tender mercy. I love the sighing of the wind when it stirs the trees; it is like His voice sighing over sinners. The rushing waters as they hurl themselves over the cataract shout to me of His power. I love women, because they have His gentleness. I love men, because He was a man. But still more news.

BRIGID: 'Tis said the King of Leinster is passing this way.

DARA: Truly?

BRIGID: He goes, they say, to seek a bride from the maidens of Ireland.

DARA: Is he tall and handsome as a king should be?

BRIGID: He is disguised as a bard, yet even disguise cannot hide his kingliness.

DARA: (*pensively*) I wish I were a queen.

BRIGID: (*plainly surprised*) Why, my child?

DARA: Because then I could lay a crown at the feet of Jesus tomorrow. Mother dear (*dropping suddenly on her knees beside Brigid and clasping her hands in the older woman's lap*) may I whisper a secret?

BRIGID: (*smoothing her veil*) As you would whisper it to your own soul.

DARA: I do not mind being blind. I know that I am happier that way. But for His sake, for the sake of Jesus . . . think, Mother, I have not even a perfect gift for Him tomorrow, only a poor maimed thing, a blind girl. The lamb I have to offer should be without spot.

BRIGID: (*petting her cheek*) But her soul is spotless, and Jesus loves souls.

DARA: Yet think, Mother dear, how perfect a gift to Christ should be. Think how beautiful His virgin spouse should seem. And though my soul sees, my body is maimed, blind.

BRIGID: I never heard you speak thus before.

DARA: (*rising and walking across the garden, pain visible in her face*) I never felt it until the day of my consecration came near.

(A Nun enters through the convent door.)

THE NUN: Mother Brigid!

BRIGID: Yes, my child?

THE NUN: A wandering bard is at the gate and begs hospitality.

DARA: *(quickly)* It is the King of Leinster.

BRIGID: Bid him enter. Bring him here into the garden.

DARA: *(rushing impulsively to her and throwing herself in her arms)* Was it wrong for me to complain? I was thinking of Him, not of myself.

BRIGID: *(holding her slightly away)* Would you wish your sight?

DARA: *(impulsively)* For tomorrow, that I may meet my Lover as a bride without blemish—yes!

(Brigid draws her gently to her and Dara holds up her face to be kissed. Very gently Brigid kisses her right eye and then her left.)

BRIGID: Then if it be God's holy will, See!

(Dara almost springs backward from her clasp, a new and wonderful look in her face. Momentarily she clasps her palms over her eyes in almost a shudder, and then flings her hands wide in a wild embracing gesture.)

DARA: Mother, Mother, I see! I see! *(She stands turning slowly in the wonder of first vision.)* Oh, how beautiful it all is! I could not

have dreamed it was all like this. Those are my roses? (*She runs to the roses, gathering them in her hands and bending above them.*) They burn into my soul like a leaping flame. And the soft leaves of the yew rest on my soul like the sound of gently crooning harps. Mother, that tremendous power up there that will not let me look upon it—is that the sun?

BRIGID: (*who has not moved*) Yes, my daughter.

DARA: (*awestruck*) It is like God.

BRIGID: (*coming toward her*) Oh, child, it is all beautiful; but think how pitifully weak it all is compared with Him.

DARA: (*slowly and in deep emotion*) It is too, too beautiful. I can think of nothing else! Yes—I did not dream it could be so fair . . . Can He surpass all this?

(*The Nun re-enters. She is followed by a man dressed in the robes of a Celtic bard. His tall, stately figure and the quiet majesty of his bearing break transparently through his rather travel-worn garments. The short naked sword at his side becomes him better than the small harp slung at his shoulder. He pauses for a moment as the door closes behind him, looking first at Mother Brigid and then at Dara. Dara feeling his look, turns and gazes full into his eyes. They stand thus motionless.*)

BRIGID: You are welcome, sir.

THE BARD: (*breaking the magnetic contact of their eyes*) Thank you, Mother Brigid. I have travelled far, and the road of my pilgrimage leads me still farther.

(*He advances graciously toward the Superior, while Dara's eyes follow him in an unwavering glance.*)

BRIGID: You are welcome to stay with us until you are rested for your journey. A king—

THE BARD: (*holding up his hand in instant protest*) No king here; only a bard and a pilgrim bound on a pilgrimage that all men must make.

BRIGID: Dara, child, a cup for our guest.

(*Dara, whose eyes have never left his face, obeys almost with a start; the Bard turns quickly toward her, but with downcast glance, she passes into the convent. He follows her with his eyes.*)

BRIGID: Your way has been long from your country?

THE BARD: (*rather abstractedly*) Aye. (*Picking up a bit of tapestry.*) Your nuns do this?

BRIGID: It is all their work.

THE BARD: It is very beautiful. Which of this is hers?

BRIGID: Dara's? (*He nods.*) None of that. She plies the distaff.

(Dara re-enters from the convent, a heavy mug resting on a tray. The Bard hears her step and rises swiftly from the chair, into which he has sunk, to await her coming. Dara comes straight to him, but avoids his glance as she offers him the mug. He raises it slowly.)

THE BARD: Thank you.

(As he drains it, she glances swiftly up and then down again. He replaces the mug on the tray.)

THE BARD: *(to Dara)* May I pay in the minstrel's coin for your kindness?

DARA: I do not understand.

THE BARD: The notes of his harp and the tones of his voice are the only coin a bard may use. Shall I pay in that?

DARA: Do!

(The Bard unslings his harp and runs his fingers over the strings. Dara places the mug and tray on the table and then comes to Brigid, sitting on the ground at her side.)

DARA *(whispering)* Mother dear.

BRIGID: Yes, child?

DARA: I did not know a man would look like this. He has the strength of the sun, the grace of the rose; his voice is as soothing as the yew's soft green. Are all men like him?

BRIGID: He is a King. But think what must be the beauty of the King of Kings.

DARA: He is a man!

(The Bard plays a brief, crooning prelude and then slips softly into his song.)

Song

The light of the sun
— To the snow-blighted earth;
The kiss of the dew
To the flower;
The mother's sweet smile
On her babe at its birth;
The flash of red lips
To a bower;
The glow of the ruby
That rests in a ring;
The glitter of stars
To the skies;
All these may be fair,
Yet a fairer I sing;
The light of true love
To the eyes!

(He finishes and places his harp gently on the ground. A moment's appreciative pause.)

BRIGID: It was very beautiful. You have paid lavishly for the welcome we can offer you.

THE BARD: *(to Dara)* Did it please you, my Sister?

DARA: Yes; it made me glad that I, too, have—eyes.

(The Nun re-enters.)

THE NUN: Mother Brigid, a poor man at the gate wishes you to touch his ears. He is deaf.

BRIGID: *(to the Bard)* You will forgive me; it will be but a moment until—

THE BARD: *(rising)* I have taken too much of your charity already.

BRIGID: No. Wait! Dara will talk with you until I return.

(She goes out very quietly with the Nun.)

THE BARD: *(to Dara)* Sit here. *(He points to a chair opposite him. She obeys.)* You are still a novice?

DARA: Tomorrow I take my vows.

THE BARD: You are very young.

DARA: Can one offer herself too soon to Him?

THE BARD: Not if one loves her life. Do you?

DARA: With all my heart.

THE BARD: Ah, but what of the great, vast world beyond your walls? Do you not love that?

DARA: That I have never seen. *(He looks surprised.)* Until today I was blind.

THE BARD: *(uncomprehending)* Until today?

DARA: Yes; today she kissed my eyes, and I see.

THE BARD: Ah, then you have never seen the great, beautiful world dripping colors as the

trees drip water after the shower; you have never seen the trusting eyes of children, the dimpled smile of women, the curving grace of a man's arm. You have never felt the thrill of power which comes when the eye glides along stark lines of sun-gilded spears, nor sensed the glow that rises to the heart when cloth of gold sweeps over inlaid floors, and tiny feet crush into perfume the scattered roses. You have never seen the power, the beauty, the skill of man.

DARA: Until today I saw but Christ.

THE BARD: Oh, I love it all—the beauty, the splendor of tree and flower and running brook, of mountain crags thrusting audacious heads into the very heavens, of starlike flowers that make of every mead another sky, and the glowing eyes and curving lips and supple hands of women, and the rippling muscle and chain-like sinews of men.

DARA: And do you love Christ?

THE BARD: Yes . . . but Him I never saw.

DARA: Why, then, have you eyes? Surely all this beauty, this power must make you see Him who made them.

THE BARD: It is all so fair; I am lost when I try to fathom even its tiniest gem, its smallest flower.

DARA: The Creator is hidden in His creation?

THE BARD: Perhaps.

DARA: And yet until today I saw Christ so clearly.

THE BARD: Until today you were blind. You are fair, very fair. Across that wall lies the world languishing for eyes that can see its beauties and drink deep of them. For every rose in this garden, there are a million fairer blossoms that shall bend to meet you when you come. Not one yew tree, but long palisades of yews shading with their branches avenues of tenderest green will lead you even to the King himself. Here the sun is fair; there it is a joyous, lavish monarch flinging its largesses to be caught up by silver and gold, by soft white hands and glistening eyes. Of what avail is sight here? Come! Let me lead you down the velvet path at the end of which gleams a waiting throne.

(Dara rises slowly, and as she stands, Mother Brigid enters from the convent with her usual slow, calm step. She is followed by a Nun.)

BRIGID: I have been over long. Come, Sir Minstrel; we have spread a board for you.

THE BARD: I thank you.

BRIGID: We will await you here. Sister Columba will serve you.

THE BARD: I shall not be long. The beauty of

your garden has captivated by heart. (*To Sister Columba.*) Will you lead the way, my Sister?

(*He goes out without turning. Dara stands quite still, and then with an appealing gesture holds out her hands to Brigid.*)

DARA: Mother dear!

BRIGID: (*coming to her and taking her hands*) My child, look up! Why, there are tears in your eyes. I never saw them when yet they could not see.

DARA: Can they see now?

BRIGID: (*uncomprehending*) Did you not say—

DARA: Yes—but can they see, really see? Mother, can one be blind because one sees too much?

BRIGID: (*drawing her to bench and sitting down*) Tell me what you mean.

DARA: Before my eyes, Mother, has risen a veil, a wonderful, beautiful veil, woven of sunlight and rose red and the glint of eyes that look their praise. Beyond that veil lies a something that until today I saw. Now I see only the veil. Beyond the veil lies Christ; but Him I no longer see.

BRIGID: Dara, my child!

DARA: Mother, I am blind with beauty! My eyes are bound with the splendor of earth and the loveliness of man. Mother, give me back my sight.

BRIGID: But the perfect victim for tomorrow?

DARA: The perfect victim is the victim that can see. And now I am blind.

(The door opens and the Bard enters softly. He stands for an instant watching Dara. Gently Brigid leans forward and kisses Dara on both eyes.)

BRIGID: Dara, I was a foolish old woman. If it be the will of God, see as you saw before.

(Dara clasps her hands over her eyes and then rises to her feet. The old blank look is in her eyes, and her hands slowly spread forward in the old characteristic gesture. From the stairs the Bard takes a step forward.)

THE BARD: Dara!

(She turns toward him, but her eyes pass him by unseeingly. A sudden single ray of light springs through the air and rests on her eyes. Then with her head flung back, she utters a glad cry.)

DARA: Mother, now I see.

(The scene closes.)

MISTRESS CASTLEMAINE'S
CHRISTMAS DINNER

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

COLONEL BRADSHAW

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE

SERGEANT DEANE

LIEUTENANT CASTLEMAINE

BRITISH SOLDIERS

MISTRESS CASTLEMAINE'S CHRISTMAS DINNER

(The scene is the large with-drawing room in a stately colonial mansion in North Carolina. The time is the late afternoon of Christmas Eve, in the year of grace, 1780. At present the room does not suggest bewigged gentlemen and beauty-patched ladies, for it has clearly been appropriated for military purposes. A heavy satin-covered sofa of the style of Louis XV supports, for example, a very dirty pair of riding boots. The beautiful crystal chandelier that hangs from the ceiling boasts not half a dozen tapers and these unshapely with molten wax. The chairs in the room, most of which match the sofa in style, are standing in precisely the ungainly positions into which their last military occupants have flung them, and the few pictures left on the walls lean at tipsy and altogether disreputable angles.)

(Before the wide hearth, in which a cheerful log fire is blazing, stands a heavy desk, clearly never intended by the original owner to find a place in this room, while over the hearth hangs

a military map of the surrounding country. Another table, one which was evidently part of the room's original furniture, stands at the opposite side of the room. A pair of double doors open into a large reception hall, and the portieres, which had once been swept aside by powdered footmen, now dangle limply from the poles. A smaller door opens into the private apartments of the house. Through the large double windows, the curtains of which are now limp rags, one catches a glimpse of a lawn covered with snow that glitters frostily in the moonlight. The only light in the room comes from the logs on the hearth and from a single candle that sputters fitfully on the shelf above the fireplace.

(The double doors open casually to admit a young man in the uniform of a British lieutenant of foot. He is tall and well-built, with a healthy, outdoor complexion; and under a rather affectedly nonchalant, indolent air—which he obviously considers befitting his rank and station—one senses a burning nervous energy which leaps occasionally to his eyes and finds expression in unexpected bursts of movement.

(He glances carelessly about the room, drifts slowly to the windows and leisurely pulls the curtains together, listens for a moment with

sudden intentness, and then fairly leaps at the desk. He thrusts a candle into the hearth and by its light, inserts a key from his pocket into a lower drawer which he jerks open. Swiftly he rifles the sheaf of papers that he takes from the drawer, lays two aside and from these makes a few rapid notes. Then outside in the corridor he hears the sound of a sentry's challenge. He flings the papers back into the desk, locks the drawer, slips his notes into a breast pocket, blows out the candle, and, dropping into a chair, lifts his feet to the top of the desk, and assumes the attitude of a soundly sleeping man.

(Once more the doors open, and in strides a British colonel. He is a man of robust middle age, florid and very much at peace with the world, the sort of man who went to the American war chiefly because he was tired of fox-hunting on his estates. The change, at first amusing enough, has begun decidedly to pall, and he is good-natured enough to express to his equals the hope that the damn rebels will end it all and give him a chance to get back to good old England. With all that, he is a stickler for discipline in his regiment and given at times to masking his own tenderness of heart under the air of a martinet. At the door he flings his heavy coat and hat onto the sofa, and then, through the dusk, he glimpses the sprawling

form of his lieutenant. He picks up his hat and cheerfully flings it at the sleeper.)

THE COLONEL: Attention, company!

(The Lieutenant leaps to his feet with a fine affectation of suddenly being aroused from sleep.)

THE COLONEL: Blasted fine discipline in the officers' quarters. Salute, you graceless young cub!

(The Lieutenant salutes sheepishly.)

THE LIEUTENANT: Beg pardon, Colonel Bradshaw. I was thoroughly tired out, and this fire put the finishing touch to me.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: *(striding down the room)* The one officer in my regiment never without an excuse is Lieutenant Sanborne. Keep your feet off my desk, sir, hereafter. *(He lights two candles on his desk.)* What did the Lord provide sofas like that over there for, if it wasn't for feet?

(Mightily pleased with his own joke, he seats himself at his desk, and very deliberately lifts his own feet to the top. The Lieutenant has crossed the room, and is half seated on the other table.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Colonel's desk for colonel's feet, not for blasted little lieutenant's. Oh, by the way . . . Merry Christmas!

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Thank you, Colonel Bradshaw! A very merry Christmas to you!

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (*filling a long-stemmed pipe*) Don't be a fool, Sanborne! It may be a merry enough Christmas for you confounded Tories; you're used to this country and don't seem to mind it. But don't wish me a merry Christmas. There's no merry Christmas for a true Britisher outside of old England. Lord, I wish the beggars would end the war one way or other. I'm sick and tired of the tiresome country and this living in empty houses.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Perhaps you fancy I'm not.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Then why don't some of you young upstarts find a way to finish the whole mess?

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: (*with unnoticed significance, and an instinctive hand on his notes*) Maybe we shall yet.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: More likely you shan't. What we need is a few women to end this war. But for the love of Heaven put them all on the one side, or we'll have a worse deadlock than ever. Gad, man, they've twice the pluck and resource of us men. I'll wager you, young man, if there were a few women in the American army, every plan and document in my drawer here (*as he puts his hand emphatically on his*

desk) would be on its way to Green or Washington by this time. The only man in their whole army that has the brains of a woman is that infernal spy, Hugh Castlemaine, and he inherited them all from his mother.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: (*indolently swinging his leg*) Why this sudden enthusiasm for the fair sex, Colonel?

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (*putting his feet on the floor and thumping his desk*) Because I met a real woman today!

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: (*still indolent*) Really?

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Called on her, by Jove! Yes, sir, on Mistress Castlemaine, the mother of the spy, herself!

(*The Lieutenant's leg stops swinging in mid-air, and a sudden wary look enters his eye.*)

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: You called on Mistress Castlemaine? Well, I'll be hanged. (*He whistles feelingly.*)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Well, why not? I'm not too old for gallantries . . . though, by Jove, that lady nearly froze my feet today.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: You never mentioned that you intended . . .

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Pure inspiration, my boy! These Southerners love their Christmas, and I could see with one eye shut that that

young daredevil of a son of hers would be back for Christmas dinner with his mother.

(Lieutenant Sanborne rises and goes back to the windows from which he draws aside the blinds.)

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: And she confirmed your suspicions, I suppose?

COLONEL BRADSHAW: *(a bit ruefully)* Damme, she invited me to Christmas dinner myself!

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: *(with a ringing laugh)* Sold, by Jove!

(The Colonel leans forward with a knowing wink.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Just wait a minute, youngster. You're outstripping the hounds. While I interviewed the mistress, Sergeant Deane interviewed the maid.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Oh, I see.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Come here!

(He rises and goes to the wall map. Lieutenant Sanborne takes his place at the Colonel's elbow.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Do you know much about this country?

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: I'm a bit thick about geography, Colonel.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Take to fox-hunting, my boy. Nothing like it for developing a grip on locality. Now look! Here is Mistress Castle-

maine's manor. (*He draws on the map with the end of a quill pen.*) Our friend Hugh will come home either by this road here, or by this, or by this! See?

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Perfectly.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: A squad of men is picketed at each road, and if we miss him when he goes for his dinner, we'll get him when he comes back.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Why not rush right in and get him at dinner?

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (*indignantly*) You Americans are simply savages. Gad, I'd lose the man altogether before I'd break in on a Christmas dinner . . . especially where Mistress Castlemaine is hostess.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: (*walking back to the window*) It's lucky Castlemaine himself hasn't heard your plans.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Why?

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Because he'd take a dive straight through the heart of the woods and into his mother's arms . . . and the soldiers could cool their heels for Christmas.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Yes, if he knew. But mark me, young fellow, we'll get our man this time.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: (*who is tired of the*

subject, yawns) You must consider him worth lots of trouble.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Worth my trouble? Gad, sir, if I had a regiment of men of his stamp, instead of lazy uniform-hangers like . . . some of my officers, I'd be riding Washington's white horse in a week. And if I get him, mark me too, he faces a firing squad on Christmas morning.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: (*still at the window*) I'll lay you ten pounds you don't get him.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Done! They're mine already.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: (*returning to the desk*) Don't spend your money till you get it, and don't shoot your spy till you catch him . . . Oh, by the way, I'd like that leave of absence now, if you'll be good enough.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Still insist you must be away for Christmas day?

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Sorry, Colonel, but I promised a friend . . .

COLONEL BRADSHAW: A friend! Bosh! I know the sort of a friend that could drag you off on Christmas day . . . snapping black eyes, a supple wrist, a slender waist, a grace and air to her . . . a young Mistress Castlemaine!

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: She is . . . very much like Mistress Castlemaine.

(*The Colonel lays his hand on the young*

man's shoulder with something like real tenderness in his touch.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: I wish you'd stay, Sanborne. I've planned a genuine English Christmas dinner tomorrow and . . . (*suddenly blustering to hide his sentiment*) and damme, you're the only officer in the regiment fit to eat it with a gentleman.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: (*obviously embarrassed*) Thank you, sir; you're more than kind. I'd like to, you know, but . . .

(*The Colonel turns fiercely to his desk and sits down.*)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Have it your own way, then. (*He pulls out paper and dips his quill.*) From tonight?

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Yes, sir.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Over Christmas merely?

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: That is all.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (*shaking sand over the document*) There.

(*A loud knock sounds on the double doors.*)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Come in!

(*Sergeant Deane enters smartly and salutes.*)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (*sharply dropping into a stiff military manner*) Well?

SERGEANT DEANE: I have to report a prisoner captured on the south road to Mistress Castlemaine's manor, sir.

(Lieutenant Sanborne wheels swiftly, a momentary dash of anxiety in his face, which almost instantly changes to an amused smile.)

SERGEANT DEANE: This letter was found on his person.

(He offers letter to the Colonel who accepts it with lighting eye.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: *(glancing at the letter)*
Jove! Bring the prisoner in!

(The Sergeant salutes and retires.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: *(banging the table)*
We've got him, Sanborne; we've got him!

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Who?

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Why, Hugh Castlemaine, you fool. Look at that letter. My ten pounds, please. *(He tosses the letter to Sanborne.)* Read that address, and tell me that you've a Colonel to be ashamed off: "To Lieutenant H. Castlemaine"! I've got our friend the spy . . . *(suddenly losing his enthusiasm)* and I'm afraid I've spoiled Mistress Castlemaine's Christmas dinner.

(The double doors open again and a small squad files in and opens to allow the prisoner to step forward. Whereupon all save the sergeant wheel and leave the room. The prisoner is a fine looking young stripling of not more than eighteen years, dressed quietly but with perfect taste in the riding costume of a gentle-

man of fashion. In the presence of the enemy he is trying his best to assume a look of self-confident bravado; for all that, a slight tremble to his lips and an accentuated color in his cheeks show the fear that is wringing hard his heart.

(Colonel Bradshaw, now all business, sits writing at his desk. Lieutenant Sanborne is down left, horror and anguish fighting in every line of his face. The prisoner glances haughtily about the room, and then his eyes suddenly fall on the Lieutenant. At first in the shadowy light of the room, he stares unrecognizing, but then a half-cry breaks from his lips and he takes an involuntary step forward. The Lieutenant raises a warning finger, and the youth falls back all in a tremble.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (*very business-like*) Advance, prisoner. Sergeant, state your case.

SERGEANT DEANE: My squad was picketed on the south road, sir. Half an hour ago, we heard a horse coming at full gallop up the road. It's a bad road, sir, and we knew that no one who did not know its every ditch and furrow would ride that way through the dark. So we waited; and when he came up, Private Flemming, who, sir, if I may say so, deserves a mention in your dispatches, seized his bridle. He tried to escape and dragged Private Flemming a score of yards

before we got him in hand. The rider was the prisoner, sir.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Very good, Sergeant. (What papers did you find on his person?) *(looking for papers)*

SERGEANT DEANE: None, sir, except the letter addressed to Lieutenant H. Castlemaine.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Post a man at the door and wait within call.

(Sergeant Deane salutes and retires.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: *(rising)* Lieutenant Castlemaine, this is a pleasure indeed.

LIEUTENANT CASTLEMAINE: *(with an effort at ease)* The pleasure is one-sided, believe me.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: My friend, Lieutenant Sanborne, can tell you that you were just now on our lips.

LIEUTENANT CASTLEMAINE: *(glancing furtively at Sanborne)* I'm honored.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: No . . . but you will be tomorrow—with a salute of twenty guns.

(Lieutenant Castlemaine starts convulsively, while the other Lieutenant starts to leap to his side.)

LIEUTENANT CASTLEMAINE: *(almost choking, but summoning his bravado)* Perhaps you will be good enough to mention my crimes.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: *(suavely)* With pleasure! Gad, I've had 'em written in ink these three months and more. *(He draws a warrant from*

his desk.) Here's a death sentence with only the date to be filled in. Pardon me while I fill out that one detail. (*He writes, and then rises to read solemnly.*) Lieutenant Castlemaine, known and self-confessed rebel spy . . .

LIEUTENANT CASTLEMAINE: I am not the spy. He is . . .

(*He had begun impulsively, but as his eye falls on Sanborne, he stops with a terrible flush on his cheek.*)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (*pausing only momentarily*) I convict you of stealing plans from the army of General Gage, of sending forged dispatches to Colonel Tarlton, of wearing a British uniform on half a score of occasions, and . . . in general (*dropping to a semi-humorous tone*) of raising the very devil with the British army.

LIEUTENANT CASTLEMAINE: To all of which I answer not guilty.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Of course you do. A fool you'd be if you didn't. (*He reaches into a drawer and pulls out some carefully wrapped packets of documents.*) There are the proofs carefully docketed. (*To Sanborne.*) You didn't know your slow old colonel had them, did you, eh?

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: My God, Colonel, don't be flippant! It's a matter of life and death with the boy.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Of death merely, I assure you.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: He's only a child, Colonel.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: The more he's disgraced the British army by his tricks.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: But, Colonel, he hasn't even admitted that he is Lieutenant Castlemaine.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (By Jove, that's a formality I'd clean forgotten.) Prisoner, be good enough to examine that letter. (*He hands Castlemaine the letter which the latter examines with just a cursory glance, fear growing every moment stronger in his eyes.*) Is that letter addressed to you?

LIEUTENANT CASTLEMAINE: I decline to answer.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (*with a rather helpless shrug*) You see, Sanborne? That doesn't help things much. Those that wear a fox's brush mustn't blame the hounds for worrying them.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: I've heard there are two of these Castlemaines. One is the spy, the other is an officer under Washington. This may not be the spy.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: More likely it is. I'm sure I've never heard of the other fellow before. In any case, this one came within lines and tried

to escape when stopped. That, to my mind, convicts him.

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Colonel, you couldn't convict a man to death on such slim evidence.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Why not? War is war. If another Castlemaine turns up before tomorrow morning, this one eats his Christmas dinner at home. Otherwise. . . . Don't be a sentimental fool, Sanborne. Between your going away and this running of Mistress Castlemaine's son into my trap my Christmas dinner is spoiled enough. Attention, prisoner! When a spy escapes, he's a hero. When he's caught, he's shot. Don't let that bother you, though; some day they'll build a monument to you. Lieutenant Sanborne, I leave the prisoner in your keeping for half an hour . . . or, precisely, until I've had my supper. Damme, I wish we had caught him tomorrow night. I hate to spoil Mistress Castlemaine's Christmas dinner.

(The Colonel leaves through the door into his private apartments. The two men stand staring at each other until the door closes, and then the prisoner leaps into the Lieutenant's arms.)

LIEUTENANT CASTLEMAINE: Hugh!

LIEUTENANT SANBORNE: Harry . . . My poor little brother!

HARRY: Hugh, Hugh, what an utter fool I've been! Rushing into a firing squad like this!

HUGH: For God's sake, boy, why did you do it? I thought you were safe in Philadelphia.

HARRY: (*breaking away, and striving to hide his fears*) I was! But I just couldn't stand it any longer. I'd never been away from home on Christmas, and I couldn't bear to think of the day without a glimpse of Mother . . . Hugh, I was just blindly, madly homesick.

HUGH: But a risk like this!

HARRY: I didn't know that it was a risk. I heard that the British were farther south, and I told my colonel I could make it.

HUGH: It was foolhardy, foolhardy! No one but a boy would have attempted it.

HARRY: Don't blame me, Hugh, I was a fool, ~~but~~ homesickness was just driving me mad. ~~And~~ the thought of Christmas far away from her. . . . You've spent Christmas at home every year, and I thought I could do it too.

HUGH: But I know the lines so thoroughly. It's different with you.

HARRY: (*fighting hard to act calm*) And the old chap, the Colonel, thinks I'm the spy. Was he serious, Hugh—? Does he mean to shoot me tomorrow . . . Christmas?

HUGH: (*working for time*) Why . . . why

. . . we'll find a way. You've not seen the firing squad yet, and . . .

HARRY: (*with sudden confidence*) Of course you'll save me, won't you, Hugh?

HUGH: (*thoughtfully*) If I let you go, he'll have you by the heels in half an hour. Let me think . . .

HARRY: I'll do whatever you say. You'll not fail me, old man. I know you won't. Tell me what to do.

(*Hugh has been pacing the room restlessly. Then he comes to an abrupt pause.*)

HUGH: Slip over your shoulders that cape there on the sofa. (*Harry lifts it and puts it on.*) Now the hat. (*Harry obeys.*) You are Lieutenant Sanborne, do you understand?

HARRY: (Yes, Hugh.) What must I do?

(*Hugh goes to the table and rifles the papers until he finds the leave of absence which the Colonel had just finished when the Sergeant entered. He picks it up and folds it carefully.*)

HUGH: Here is your leave of absence over Christmas. Slip it into your pocket. The password tonight is "Cornwallis." Give the word to each sentry; and if questioned by the officer of the guard, show the leave of absence. Do you understand?

HARRY: Yes. I'll slip through the lines and

be heading back for Philadelphia before they've found I've gone.

HUGH: (*deliberately*) You're not going back to Philadelphia; you're going to Christmas dinner with Mother!

HARRY: Oh, thank you, Hugh! I knew you'd find a way.

HUGH: Now go as fast as you can and don't stop for a moment, (beyond what is absolutely necessary.) (*Their hands meet in a tight clasp.*) My love and a kiss to Mother. Wish her a Merry Christmas for me.

(*For the first time Harry sees dimly what Hugh is doing.*)

HARRY: But you . . . won't you eat Christmas dinner with us?

HUGH: I'll spend my Christmas day here, in camp.

HARRY: (*anxiously*) Hugh, what are you doing? The Colonel will send to retake me as soon as he finds that I'm gone.

HUGH: No.

HARRY: Why not? (*The full truth dawns on him.*) He won't send for me because you're staying in my place. He said he'd free me if the other Castlemaine appeared. And you . . . Hugh, you shan't! I won't let you die in my place. I'll stay and face it out alone.

(*He starts to remove his cloak.*)

HUGH: (*seizing his wrist*) I'm not dying in your place. I'm simply stepping into my own. If you stay here, neither of us eats Christmas dinner with Mother. It is your duty to think of her, and I command it. You will keep Christmas with her. You will do the hardest thing in the world, laugh and sing and jest as if you knew nothing about my being here in camp. You will tell her that I was detained with the army and that when last you saw me I was in perfect health and only sorry I couldn't be with her for Christmas.

HARRY: (*fiercely*) I can't do it! To leave you here to face the firing squad . . .

HUGH: You can't do the braver act? You can't save her Christmas day from ruin? You can and shall. If you stay here, it is sure death. If I stay . . . well, it's not the first tight squeeze, and, please God, I'm not dead yet. Are you a man or a child?

HARRY: Hugh!

HUGH: Are you? (*Harry lifts his head proudly*) Very well! (You will go and keep Christmas with Mother. You will play the man. If by a single sign you mar her Christmas dinner tomorrow, if you betray one whit of what you know of me, you are unworthy of her and no true brother of mine. Will you go?

HARRY: I'll go.

(He flings himself again into the arms of his brother.)

HUGH: Now go. God bless you! And a Merry Christmas to Mother.

(Harry replaces his hat, folds the leave of absence and thrusts it into his pocket, turns the collar up about his ears and wheels with something military in his walk. At the door he pauses, hesitates for a moment, and then flings himself into the gloom beyond.)

(A clock strikes the hour of nine. A sentry's challenge is heard through the darkness. Hugh removes his pistol from its holster and lays it on the Colonel's table. Then he unbuckles his sword and places it beside the pistol. With a swift setting of his shoulders, he goes to the windows and looks out longingly into the night.)

(The door of the Colonel's private apartments opens and the Colonel strides into the room.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Well, Sanborne, I see you've disposed of our prisoner.

HUGH: *(coming back from the window)* Yes, sir.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: I couldn't eat a decent supper though, thinking of him and that mother of his. Confounded fine son and confounded fine mother. I hate to think I've spoiled their

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Christmas dinner. (*He sinks into his desk chair and speaks to Hugh without looking his way.*)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: What did you do with him, Sanborne?

HUGH: (*very quietly*) I gave him my leave of absence and sent him home to Mistress Castlemaine's.

(*Colonel Bradshaw rises very slowly and stares at Hugh, only half understanding.*)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Be good enough to say that again.

HUGH: I gave Lieutenant Castlemaine the leave of absence which you had written for me, and sent him through the lines to his mother's home.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: (*suddenly terrible in his wrath*) By Gad, Sanborne, I'll look into your case in a minute! But first I'll drag that spy back if I have to take him from his mother's arms.

HUGH: No use, Colonel. You've given your word you wouldn't.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: What the devil . . .

HUGH: If the other Castlemaine appeared, the prisoner was to go free. Do you remember that?

(*The Colonel suddenly sees a fine bit of theatrics under the unintelligible conduct of his beloved Lieutenant.*)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Gad, man, you don't mean to say we've got the other Castlemaine as well?

HUGH: In a sort of way it comes to that. Colonel, I'm sorry to have to tell you that I am Hugh Castlemaine, the American spy.

(The Colonel sinks back in his chair, an agonized look on his face.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: You . . . I don't believe it!

HUGH: *(trying hard to be very business-like)* My sword and pistol I've laid on your table. Here *(going into his pocket)* are the plans I copied from those in your desk just this afternoon.

(He lays them on the table. The Colonel rises slowly to his feet, staring at Hugh with more of pain than anger in his eyes.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: You . . . you . . . why did you have to tell me this . . . on Christmas eve?

HUGH: I'm sorry, sir, that I've had to pain you, but it was between my brother and me.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: *(still crushed)* I've loved you and trusted you like a son!

HUGH: Please don't! That's the only thing about it all that cuts to the quick. Don't fancy I've loved my work. But someone had to do it. War is war . . . you've said so yourself. Some-

one had to ~~sneak and~~ lie and cheat with a false smile. It's simply the rule of the rotten game. But I'm sorry, sir, that I had to ~~sneak and lie~~ and cheat a gentleman who might, in happier times, have been a friend. There have been moments in this wretched business when I've looked at you and thought that shooting would not be so hard after all. Colonel, I'm ready for the guard.

(Colonel Bradshaw keeps his eyes on his Lieutenant for a long moment, as his affection for the man and his sense of justice rise slowly to command.)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Lieutenant Castlemaine, you've sneaked and lied and cheated, and I ought to despise you for it. But, by Gad, sir, somehow you've sneaked and lied and cheated like a gentleman, sir, and this afternoon like a hero. You played your game and now you're ready to pay your stakes for the sake of a silly little brother who stuck his head into a noose. Sir, you're a worthy son of Mistress Castlemaine. *(He picks up the bundles of evidence and looks at them whimsically.)* I wonder if I deserve courtmartial for destroying evidence. *(He flings them into the fire. Then he picks up the note book of stolen plans.)* Your stolen plans, eh? *(He throws them after the evidence.)* I guess this warrant would hold for you too,

wouldn't it? (*He tears it slowly into strips and then drops them into the fire. Then in a loud voice he calls off.*) Sergeant.

(*Sergeant Deane promptly responds.*)

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Sergeant, Lieutenant Sanborne has leave of absence over Christmas day. On the morning of the twenty-sixth, you will take a squad of men and escort him as a prisoner of war to my Lord Cornwallis. Do you understand, as prisoner of war?—

SERGEANT DEANE: Yes, sir.

(*He salutes and retires.*)

HUGH: Colonel!

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Hold your tongue, sir. A man can make a fool of himself without comments from you. You give your word of honor to return on December the twenty-sixth.

HUGH: Yes, sir.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: Now, go! Of course you are aware that British troops do not shoot prisoners of war.

HUGH: Thank you, sir.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: My kind regards to Mistress Castlemaine. Tell her that I regret I cannot accept her invitation to dinner, but am sending you as my substitute. Tell her I hope that she enjoys herself as much as she would if I were present.

HUGH: With all my heart I thank you.

COLONEL BRADSHAW: As for you, sir, you've spoiled my Christmas dinner with your confounded treachery. Damme if I ever trust an American again! Now get out and . . . Merry Christmas!

(And as Hugh runs joyfully through the double doors that lead to Mistress Castlemaine's dinner,

the scene closes.)

THE FLAME LEAPS UP

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

MARY LANGFORD

SIR PHILIP MARSTON

SIR NICHOLAS LEE

MASTER NEWCOMER

A SERVANT

TWO PURSUIVANTS

THE FLAME LEAPS UP

(The scene is the spacious library in the country home of Sir Nicholas Lee. A cooler, homelier room Devonshire cannot boast, its ceiling beamed with age-stained oak and its rows of open shelves packed with volumes from the presses of Europe's master printers. The Renaissance had no more devoted worshipper than the father of the present Sir Nicholas, and the library was his chiefest pride.

(Evening has fallen over the countryside; through the large double doors swung wide at the rear and through the flat-arched leaded windows at each side, one catches glimpses of the manor lawn frosted with moonlight and dotted now with gay swinging lanterns. The room itself is in semi-darkness; a single taper burns upon the fine old table and multiplies its reflection in the polished backs of oaken chairs. One picture, a portrait of the first Sir Nicholas by Holbein, occupies a conspicuous place on the wall.

(The sound of music floats in from the garden, blending with an occasional purl of laugh-

ter and an indistinct murmur of voices. The flash of a bright gown or silken doublet under the swaying lanterns gives just a suggestion of life to the lawn.

(The time is the spacious days of great Elizabeth while the Armada lumbered down upon the island and England stood on tip-toe for the leap.

(Through the broad doors suddenly runs a young woman, lithe and graceful and swift as a darter. She is dressed in the lavish fashion of the day, a fashion that made plainness ridiculous and swathed beauty in disguising steel and ribbed satin. Yet her fresh beauty of skin and hair and eyes laugh through the absurdity of fashion, as beauty will do, let what mode men will, prevail. She is quite breathless and stands, her finger tips resting on the table, laughing in short gasps as a young man runs in in pursuit.

(He too, is young, only a few years her senior, tall and muscular, with the clearness of feature and build that is the equivalent of manly beauty. His dress is that of an age when men dressed to please a queen whose eye rested favoringly on handsome male figures.)

THE GIRL: I've outdanced you and outrun you too—and you, Sir Philip Marston, of her Majesty's court, just up from London!

SIR PHILIP: But not outloved me—Mary.

MARY: (*mockingly*) How much your manners are improved by life at court.

SIR PHILIP: That wasn't life at court; that was the inspiration of the moment. And the inspiration as always was—you.

MARY: (*with a quick laugh*) Oh, the silly! He must explain his compliments for the simple country girl.

PHILIP: (*beginning to skirt the table*) Mary—

MARY: (*keeping still on the far side*) I hope for the sake of some hapless girl, you love better than you dance. You trod my left slipper and you mussed my train.

PHILIP: Whose fault was that?

MARY: Not mine, and there were but two of us dancing.

PHILIP: Was ever woman to blame for anything? Could I guess you would dance your own sweet way, and not as the court decrees?

MARY: A clever partner would have followed me.

PHILIP: (*reaching her side at last*) Clever or not, I'd follow you to the world's end.

MARY: (*clapping her hands*) Prettily done! The queen would make you privy counselor for such a compliment.

PHILIP: (*seriously*) I'd rather my compliment won you, Mary, than all the offices of the realm.

MARY: (*dropping into a chair near the table*

and looking up at him) Philip, must you be serious tonight?

PHILIP: (*sitting on the table very near her*) Especially tonight. Why, there's a tense feeling everywhere; you can't mistake it. This frolic and dancing here is just a gay mask to hide our heart-breaking anxiety. Just think, Mary; the fate of England may be decided—who knows?—during the next country dance.

MARY: (*eagerly*) Shall we know if the Armada is crushed?

PHILIP: Yes. The fires will leap from hill to hill from the coast here to Devonshire and on to the land's end.

MARY: (*with real passion*) Oh, how I shall dance and laugh and sing if the fires flames out tonight! The Spaniard can't touch our England, can he, Phil? The Armada will be crushed, don't you think?

PHILIP: (*solemnly*) As sure as God's might is with England.

MARY: Oh, if I were a man! To be with Drake and Hawkins tonight and smash good English balls and blades into the insolent Spaniards. I loathe them!

PHILIP: (*regarding her thoughtfully*) Sometimes, Mary, I can't understand you at all. Don't you know that Spanish Philip is bringing your religion back to England?

MARY: (*rising*) I don't want it at his hands.

PHILIP: (*with sudden passion taking her hand*) Listen to me, Mary! You've fled from me, laughed at me, mocked my love-making all these months, and do you think I don't know why?

(*Mary raises her head quickly.*)

It isn't because you don't love me. Don't deny that; I won't let you. It's because you've clung to the old faith while I've thrown in my lot with the new. In one way you're right, dear; we couldn't be happy together unless even our faiths were the same. But for the rest, you're wrong. Mary, dear, you're living for a shadow, a dead lifeless hulk, a soulless thing, a faith that has been stripped of strength and glory and beauty. England is alive and strong and pulsing with energy today, and her faith is the strong faith. Your church is dead. Your priests are skulking traitors, afraid to show their faces in the light of day, lying and tricking and plotting with foreign enemies for the downfall of their own land, consorting with the scum and outlaw of the country. While Englishmen ride forth to fight for queen and country, your Catholic nobles tremble in their manors and pay humble court to their servants lest they be informed on. Where are your churches, your

altars, your shrines? Swept away in a cleansing flood, dismantled, shadows that left no trace behind as they passed. Today, Protestant England loves and fights and lives and sings, while a pitiful Catholic remnant hides in twilight corners. Mary, dear, you are not of such; you cannot live for a shadow. You are an Englishwoman, a proud, beautiful, high-spirited Englishwoman. You are part of the life and energy and grace of England, and the life and energy and beauty of England is of my faith, not yours. Mary, give up the shadow, the weak, pitiful thing. I love you; come with me into the living reality, the faith of the strong.

(She has been listening to his words intensely moved. Now she stands with averted face, spelled by the magnetism of his appeal.)

MARY: *(slowly)* I love strength.

PHILIP: You must, you are an Englishwoman.

MARY: *(turning to him abruptly)* You feel certain of it; the Armada will be crushed?

PHILIP: As surely as God is with the strong of soul. Mary, won't you give me an answer—now?

MARY: Please don't force me to answer you; give me just another brief space.

PHILIP: But you love me, don't you?

MARY: Yes.

(He starts forward eagerly, but she holds him back with a compelling gesture.)

MARY: Wait, please. I couldn't give myself to you unless I gave you everything I am; and my faith is a part of me. I want to give you my whole self. It would be all—or nothing.

PHILIP: I know. I love you best for that.

MARY: Then please don't ask me again; I might say yes against my will, and that would be terrible, wouldn't it? We'll dance this night through; but at midnight come back here. If on the table here you find a rose, it will mean I am yours, Philip, faith and all. If not *(she touches the cross that rests upon her breast)* you'll find my cross.

PHILIP: God grant it be the rose, dear; I could not bear the cross. But you will think of what I said tonight, Mary, of the strength and the shadow?

MARY: Tonight I shall give my heart to the stronger faith.

PHILIP: *(raising her hand to his lips)* Then I have won you, my Mary.

(A bluff voice suddenly sounds outside.)

THE VOICE: Come in, sir; it's a pleasure to show my library to a man of learning like yourself.

(The door opens, as the young people swiftly separate, to admit Sir Nicholas himself. He is

a hale, hearty man of the world, too well fed, too well drunk, and too overbearingly hospitable, but for all that jovial, courteous, and, to his friends, generous, the sort of man whose natural virtues make one forget to ask for the higher gifts of grace.

(He is followed by a man of less than medium height, young and rather frail of build, dressed plainly, though in the approved fashion. His eyes are quick but keenly sensitive, and his whole air is tinged with a timidity and shyness that is more marked by its contrast to Sir Nicholas' domineering manner.)

SIR NICHOLAS: *(still talking)* And there are cursed few men of real learning to care for books these warring days. You see, my father, the first Sir Nicholas, was an intimate of Thomas More, before Bluff Hal took a fancy to Sir Tom's head, and these books— *(he sees the young people for the first time and stops with a hearty laugh.)* Well, well! Blessed if every dusky corner I've stumbled on this evening hasn't yielded up a pair. Playing hide and seek again at your own party, Trixie?

MARY: We were tired . . .

SIR NICHOLAS: Bah! No young people ever tire, except of a crowd when they want solitude. Eh, Master Newcomer?

PHILIP: It was hot outside, and we thought—

SIR NICHOLAS: (*vastly pleased to this chance at repartee*) Men of your age don't think; they only feel! Master Newcomer, this is my ward, Mistress Mary Langford, as pretty a girl as graces England. This is Sir Philip Marston of her Majesty's court. Master Newcomer is a friend of the Railstones and has but lately returned from the continent.

(*Newcomer bows rather stiffly but says nothing. Mary curtsies low, and Philip contents himself with a slight bow of recognition. A servant enters and lights more tapers.*)

SIR NICHOLAS: That's better; that will be light enough to see the books, I think, eh?

PHILIP: (*to Mary*) Shall we dance, Mary?

MARY: Yes. I don't like him; do you?

PHILIP: And you're willing to dance with me to escape him? Is that it?

MARY: That's simply silly.

PHILIP: (*to Sir Nicholas*) With your leave, we're off to dance again.

SIR NICHOLAS: God speed! And if news comes of the Armada, then dance the faster for it. Odd's life! When the heart is light, the feet are light too. God wot! It's years since either my heart or my feet were other than weighted with lead.

(*Mary runs to him and kisses him on the cheek.*)

MARY: Don't you dare to say things like that at my party.

SIR NICHOLAS: (*his arm about her*) There, Trixie; you're fairy enough to change any lead into gold. Now run along. Master Newcomer hasn't time to listen to how much you love me. And Philip—why, the boy's glaring at me like a jealous lap-dog. Off, the pair of you!

(*Mary and Philip run off hand in hand. Master Newcomer's eyes follow them as they go. Sir Nicholas sighs and turns, the genial host once more.*)

SIR NICHOLAS: And now, sir, browse as you will among my books. Why, they should be like rare wine to a glutton. There are old parchments that my father got from the Black Friars, and some folios that Master Caxton printed for the monks at Ladywell, and—oh, there's hundreds I don't know by name, and couldn't read if I cared to.

NEWCOMER: Your father served on the Commission when the monasteries fell, I believe?

SIR NICHOLAS: Indeed he did, and willingly at that. Being a scholar he turned his eyes on the monkish libraries, and like a good cook, when his hand was in the broth, he didn't hesitate to lick it, eh?

NEWCOMER: (*with just a glance*) He must have been firm in the new faith.

SIR NICHOLAS: As strong as any in the realm, and Bluff Hal loved him for it. So are all his descendants, thank God, except Mistress Mary. But trust Sir Philip to convert her before many days. I know the force of good argument when it wears a handsome face and boasts well-filled hose.

NEWCOMER: (*taking a book from the shelf and opening it*) I don't suppose any of these . . . seminary priests have called to see her.

SIR NICHOLAS: (*in sudden wrath*) Odd's bones, no! If one of those skulking knaves, traitors to their queen and country, were to show his face in my house, I'd fling him to the hounds.

NEWCOMER: Yet they say these priests come and go.

SIR NICHOLAS: True; rats get into the best granaries. But our pursuivants are sharp and our laws are strict. I've heard that one of that traitorous brood is in the county now, but the pursuivants are close on his heels; I know that too. (*Newcomer's shoulders move perceptibly.*) By gad, sir, a priest would make a roaring bonfire when news comes that we've whipped their popish armada. And I know for certain when they lay this priest by the heels, they'll burn him in the public square. His fellow knaves need an example.

(The book drops from Newcomer's hand, but he stoops quite calmly to pick it up.)

SIR NICHOLAS: *(his tone suddenly changing to geniality)* I ask your pardon, sir. Here I talk along while my student grows impatient to be at his treasures. I'll leave you for a while. In an hour or so I'll return. Odd's life, man; have a care or you'll founder yourself with too much mental fodder.

(He leaves with a ringing laugh. Newcomer stands motionless, facing the cases. When the laugh dies away, he turns swiftly, with unutterable terror written in his face. He flings aside his book and almost staggers toward the table which he grasps with hands that tremble in the light. Swiftly, his face grey and haggard, he blows out all save one taper, then he flings himself on his knees and buries his ashy face in his hands. For an instant he kneels in agonized prayer, then a slight sound brings him swiftly to his feet, and he almost leaps back into the shadows of the book-shelves.)

(As he does, Mary enters, humming softly to herself. She pauses momentarily in the door, looks back toward the garden and breaks her melody with a little sigh. Then she takes a rose from her hair, kisses it lingeringly, and trips toward the table. She stands for a moment looking at the rose in her hand, and then Newcomer

steps forward into the light, scarcely a trace of his recent struggle in his face.)

NEWCOMER: I beg your pardon, Mistress Mary.

(Mary starts back, her rose crushed in her palm. A marked aversion then indicates that she has recognized the intruder.)

MARY: Oh; I saw the lights go out and I thought you had gone . . .

NEWCOMER: No, Mistress Mary. I was waiting.

MARY: *(hurriedly)* I'm sorry; I interrupted you . . . I must go . . . they expect me.

NEWCOMER: Please don't. You see *(in obvious embarrassment)* I was waiting for you.

MARY: *(clearly surprised)* But why for me?

NEWCOMER: *(very ill at ease and uncertain of himself)* If I might keep you from the dance for just a moment. It isn't fair, I know; but believe me, I thought I might help you in some little way. You see, you are a Catholic and so am I.

(Mary's look indicates that she feels no pride in the common bond between them.)

MARY: Well?

NEWCOMER: And I felt, you know, that in these times of trial and suffering, it would be a consolation to speak to a girl of one's own faith, and to learn from her own lips that she is true and loyal to the old faith.

MARY: (*her hand opening for an instant on the rose*) Oh! weren't you afraid, Master Newcomer, you might not find her as you had hoped?

NEWCOMER: (*very positive*) No. She is still true, I am sure of that. Tell me; is she not?

(*Mary turns away, the rose held tightly to her breast.*)

NEWCOMER: (*impulsively*) Mistress Mary, believe me, I know your trouble, your temptation. It isn't reason that is swaying your heart; it is love that argues, that pleads—

(*Mary looks at him quickly, resentfully, and then turns to go; but he blocks her way.*)

NEWCOMER: Please; for just a moment.

MARY: (*with suppressed anger*) What right have you to intrude on my affairs, to ask me questions like that, to talk to me of temptations and troubles and—love?

NEWCOMER: (*very simply*) The right of a priest over one of his flock in danger.

MARY: (*looking at him more in pity than resentment*) So, you are a priest. He was right, then; we are all turned cowards, hiding ourselves from the light. Stand aside, please, and let me go.

NEWCOMER: Mistress Mary, for the love of the dear Christ . . .

MARY: (*suddenly*) Do you know that the pursuivants are looking for you everywhere?

NEWCOMER: (*with a start he cannot quite disguise*) Yes.

MARY: They will burn you at the stake for this if they find you . . . You know that too?

NEWCOMER: (*his fear plainly visible in his eyes*) Yes.

MARY: (*looking at him keenly*) And you . . . are afraid.

NEWCOMER: (*gripping himself hard*) Yes; terribly afraid.

MARY: (*relentlessly*) Is it fear that makes you come to me in disguise, waiting for me in dark corners, hiding behind the shield of a false name?

NEWCOMER: What other way—

MARY: (*unable to conceal her scorn*) And I have pledged myself to choose the stronger faith.

NEWCOMER: (*imploringly*) Mistress Mary, I beg you, do not judge our faith by me . . .

MARY: (*impulsively*) What else can I do? Oh, I am a Catholic yet, but how can I love a faith that is making cravens of us all? England has strength and courage and openness—and we Catholics have lost all that—all.

NEWCOMER: I beseech you . . .

MARY: I love the strength that sends forth heroes to fight Armadas . . .

NEWCOMER: Perhaps there are things that need more courage than fighting Armadas.

MARY: (*sceptical*) What are they?

NEWCOMER: Skulking, and hiding from the light of day, and knowing that one is being thought a coward.

MARY: (*quickly turning away*) I am going . . .

NEWCOMER: Mistress Mary, wait! You say you have pledged yourself to chose the stronger faith . . .

MARY: Yes.

NEWCOMER: That was Sir Philip's idea, was it not?

MARY: I do not care to—

NEWCOMER: That does not matter. I ask only one thing; do not make your decision till I have left tonight.

MARY: Must I listen to more futile appeals, more wordy argument?

NEWCOMER: I shall not speak to you again unless you wish it.

(*Philip appears suddenly in the door, but stops abruptly unseen by either of them.*)

NEWCOMER: Promise me . . . That at least, promise me.

(*Philip steps forward, his eyes flashing.*)

PHILIP: Mary!

(*She turns to him, sudden fear in her eyes. In an instant he is at her side.*)

PHILIP: Who is that man?

MARY: Philip, please . . .

NEWCOMER: (*in a final effort*) Promise me!

MARY: (*caught by his earnestness*) I promise.

(*Newcomer's tense frame relaxes; but Philip looks from one to the other in amazement. Then he seizes both her hands.*)

PHILIP: Mary, tell me; who is this man that dares demand promises of you?

MARY: Philip, please don't ask me. Take me out to the dancers.

PHILIP: (*in sudden fear*) He isn't . . . anything to you, is he?

MARY: (*her eyes quickly brimming with hurt tears*) Philip!

PHILIP: (*bending penitently over her hand*) Forgive me. (*He strides over to Newcomer.*) I'm not asking what the promise is you forced from Mistress Mary, because I trust her. But I am afraid if you stay here longer, my sword will grow impatient of its scabbard.

NEWCOMER: It will find an easy conquest; I shall not leave, and I do not fight.

PHILIP: (*nervously slapping a loose glove against his bare palm*) Master Newcomer, I do not waste many words on men who do not fight. I think it would be best for both of us . . . if you were to go.

MARY: Philip, please . . .

NEWCOMER: No.

(Philip raises his glove to strike Newcomer; but as he does, he suddenly sees the truth. Impatiently he thrusts his glove into his belt and takes Newcomer in with one sweeping glance.)

PHILIP: Oh, I see. So you are a priest.

NEWCOMER: Yes.

PHILIP: If this were yesterday, I think I should kill you myself; but today . . . *(He draws himself up proudly in the full consciousness of his superiority over this weak, disguised priest.)* Mary, no argument I could have used is as vivid as this. Master Newcomer evidently doesn't know that his presence here is the strongest argument against the faith he propagates in secret. Where now is the strength? With the faith that faces Armadas, or the faith that sends its priests disguised into the houses of unsuspecting hosts?

MARY: *(feeling his argument keenly)* Philip!

PHILIP: *(still condescending in his strength)* You are wasting precious time here, Master Newcomer—if that is really your name. I shall not betray you; I feel I owe you too much for that. But for your own sake, I advise you to go before—

(A sudden clattering of horses' hoofs sounds down the road, and then a stern voice calls out.)

VOICE: Officers of her Majesty, the Queen!

(A scurrying of feet, and Sir Nicholas' voice giving orders comes as an immediate response.)

MARY: *(who has run to the door)* They are the pursuivants.

PHILIP: You had better fly.

NEWCOMER: You say you will not betray me?

PHILIP: I am a man of honor.

NEWCOMER: They will not recognize me. I am new in the country, and in this disguise . . .

PHILIP *(with contempt)*: I might have known you would provide for your precious safety.

(Sir Nicholas, loud in his welcome, leads two pursuivants into the room. They are plainly tired and covered with the dust of the road.)

SIR NICHOLAS: Never more welcome guest in my home than officers of her Majesty, God bless her! Come in, my friends. Ah, Mary. These are officers of the Queen and hot on the trail of that skulking priest.

(Newcomer stands at the table calmly lighting the candles from the one that he had not extinguished.)

THE CHIEF PURSUIVANT: We're grateful for your hospitality. But business first. You say, sir, that every man in this house is known personally to yourself, and you vouch on your word of honor for all of them?

SIR NICHOLAS: Every man, sir, unless you ex-

cept Master Newcomer here, a scholar and the friend of the Railstones.

(The pursuivant looks at Newcomer, and then strides up holding out his hand. Newcomer faces him quite calmly, and as he takes the outstretched hand, he holds the lighted candles daringly close to his face. The pursuivant turns satisfied, but as Newcomer replaces the candles, his hand trembles ever so slightly.)

THE PURSUIVANT: I was sure, Sir Nicholas, that we would not find him here. But our orders are absolute, you understand. We've got to make an example of this fellow before the country is overrun with the plague of priests.

SIR NICHOLAS: It would be a daring priest that would enter my door.

PHILIP: Don't you know this priest?

THE PURSUIVANT: *(laughing rather ruefully)* No; we have never seen him; he's new in our county. But we hope to catch him at his priestly mummary or with some sign of his craft on him. Otherwise—well, the luck is always with the pursuivants.

(A servant enters bearing goblets for all.)

SIR NICHOLAS: Ah! Here, my friends, drink deep. *(They each take a goblet, Newcomer with the rest.)* Here's a toast; drink it down! To British pluck against Spanish bulk; defeat

to the Armada and the Church of Rome and triumph to our fleet and the Church of England.

(They raise their glasses to their lips. Newcomer alone stands hesitant, the old look of terror in his eyes, but with his lips set tightly. Then with a quick gesture, he flings the contents out through the open door. The men start; Philip's hand goes instinctively to his sword; Mary falls back, her goblet still untouched. There is a silence tense with surprise and emotion.)

SIR NICHOLAS: *(almost incoherent)* What the devil is wrong here?

NEWCOMER: I am sorry, Sir Nicholas; I cannot drink that toast.

THE PURSUIVANT: *(stepping up to Newcomer)* Let me look at you again.

(They stand face to face.)

(Then a sudden light flames out in the darkness from a distant hill. It is caught up and repeated on a second and third hill. The faint sound of shouting comes in through the door.)

MARY: *(seeing it first)* Philip—look!

PHILIP: *(reaching the door in a joyful spring)* Great God! the signal fire! Sir Nicholas, quick. It's victory for England. We've beaten them! We've crushed the Spanish Don!

(In the moment of triumph Newcomer is forgotten; they all rush to the open door leaving him standing quietly waiting at the table. A

single spasm of fear crosses his face, but he grips his hands tight, and waits.)

SIR NICHOLAS: (*English pride welling high*) You're right, lad. Odd's life, you're right. The flame of victory is sweeping over England.

PHILIP: (*taking Mary's hand*) Think of it, Mary; our few slight craft, our handful of men have crushed the might of Catholic Spain. On what side is God fighting now? Where now is the strength?

SIR NICHOLAS: Oh, lad! the pride of old England is high tonight. God bless our British pluck and courage.

PHILIP: (*to Mary*) Must I wait longer? Can't I have my sign—now?

(Mary's hand, still holding the rose, goes out toward him, but withdraws as Sir Nicholas turns from the door and striding down to Newcomer stands facing him with blazing eyes.)

SIR NICHOLAS: Master Newcomer, if you were not under my roof, I'd question your insult to your country with my sword. As it is . . . Who the devil are you to dare refuse to drink my toast?

NEWCOMER: (*turning away wearily toward the pursuivants*) Gentleman, if you are ready to resume your way, you may end your search now.

MARY: (*in an effort to ward off his rash act*)
Master Newcomer!

THE PURSUIVANT: By the great Lord Harry!
It's our friend the priest turned plain fool!

SIR NICHOLAS: The priest . . . in my house!

NEWCOMER: I'm sorry I had to thrust myself
in upon you, Sir Nicholas; I'm quite ready to
rid your house of my presence.

SIR NICHOLAS: You damned traitor!

NEWCOMER: (*with an unexpected pride*) No
traitor I. I love my country more than you do,
Sir Nicholas. I have risked life for what I hold
her good.

SIR NICHOLAS: (*in deep disgust*) Bah!

THE PURSUIVANT: In all my days this is the
first priest I've seen throw away his life. Didn't
you hear me say I couldn't recognize you? You
fool, you must be in love with the stake and the
flames.

NEWCOMER: (*his eye on Mary*) Stake and
flames are a cheap price to pay for one soul's
faltering faith.

SIR NICHOLAS: You're playing the spendthrift
in vain, Master Priest. One soul? Why, all
England stands with the new faith tonight. The
Armada and the old degenerate Church went
down together before good Protestant ball and
shell.

NEWCOMER: (*to the pursuivants*) Come, gen-

tlemen; we are wasting Sir Nicholas' time to no purpose. Let us go.

MARY: (*rushing forward*) This is folly, madness! Why have you done this thing?

PHILIP: (*catching her hand*) Mary, don't let this man's insanity unnerve you.

MARY: (*turning to Sir Nicholas*) Uncle, you can't let them drag him out to the flames—from your house.

SIR NICHOLAS: He betrayed the hospitality I offered him. I have no pity for traitors.

NEWCOMER: (*quietly*) Thank you, Mistress Mary, but this is quite for the best. God keep you!

SIR NICHOLAS: Come, Philip; we've wasted enough time with this traitor. We'll see these gentlemen safely off the grounds. (*Turning toward the signal fires*) There, gentlemen, the signal fires still flame over glorious England, lighting your homeward path. Mary, we'll be back as soon as these gentlemen and their prisoner are once more on their way.

(*They go out quietly; but Philip, who is the last of the party, pauses in the door, and runs once more to Mary's side.*)

PHILIP: (*tenderly*) This sorry affair has completely upset you, dear; hasn't it?

MARY: (*smiling at him*) Completely.

PHILIP: It's a senseless shame. That med-

dling priest . . . But we'll forget it soon in the victory of England and our love. You've not forgotten your promise?

MARY: How could I, Philip?

PHILIP: And you will leave the token, as you promised?

MARY: Yes.

PHILIP: You have chosen the stronger faith?

MARY: (*in sudden exaltation*) Yes, the stronger faith.

PHILIP: (*kissing her hand passionately*) My Mary!

(*He runs out through the open door leaving her with the exaltation still upon her. Then, breaking the spell, she walks slowly toward the table and half mechanically extinguishes all save the single candle. From a distant hill a signal fire leaps up in a short, brilliant flame, then dies away. In her hand the rose still lies, crushed and broken; slowly she allows the petals to fall to the floor. A galling mist of tears wells up in her eyes, but she brushes them away, and with a single gesture takes the cross from her neck. Passionately she kisses it and lays it on the table. As she runs blindly from the room*

the scene closes.)

SIR FOLLY

DRAMATIS PERSONÆ

GODFREY (*A Sentry*)

MARION (*A Peasant Girl*)

FRANÇOIS (*A Jester*)

DUKE OF ARLAIN

LADY YVONNE

GUARDS AND COURTIERS

SIR FOLLY

(It is in the days when fairies danced by summer moonlight, when knights wore ladies' favors on their arms, and when faith still moved mountains and men's stony hearts. The scene is the outward gate of the courtyard of a ducal palace, massive, iron-studded, scarred with a hundred wounds of siege. A broad highway sweeps up from the west and in through the gate, but to the east a smoothly rolling lawn rubs its soft cheek against the rough base of the wall, and a single strong vine lifts its daring leaves hopefully toward the battlements above.

(On the gate, now partly ajar, is fastened a large proclamation written on stiff parchment that raps smartly against the wood as it sways in the breeze. From within comes the faint buzz of a thousand voices and above them rises an occasional shout.

(A solitary sentry leans on his lance before the gate, evidently waiting impatiently for his release from duty. At every shout, he turns expectantly toward the gate, but each time his face shows increasing disappointment.

(There is a moment's pause, and then up the road from the west trips a young girl. She is fair with the beauty of fresh air, simple food, and innocent joy of heart. Her face, dimpled and radiantly youthful, smiles forth from a mist of hoydenish curls. Her feet and arms are bare, and her dress the simplest white frock of a peasant girl with just a holiday touch of gay riband at shoulders and waist. She carries a basket full of fresh flowers which she swings in rhythm to her unconsciously dancing step. Quite heedless of the soldier, she trips up toward the gate, till, with a surprised start, she finds herself running full into the shaft of his spear dropped unexpectedly across her path. She falls back a pace or two facing the sentry wide-eyed, her hand suppressing a quick cry of frightened surprise.)

THE SENTRY: *(roughly)* None but the nobility pass this gate!

THE GIRL: *(deeply disappointed and abashed)* Oh!

THE SENTRY: *(appraising her calmly)* Though I swear not a countess that passed was half as pretty as you.

THE GIRL: *(in horrified protest)* That couldn't be! Countesses are always beautiful.

THE SENTRY: *(coldbloodedly)* Did you ever see a countess?

THE GIRL: Never.

THE SENTRY: (*closing the argument*) Well, I have.

THE GIRL: But the troubadours say—

THE SENTRY: All the troubadours are blind like Homer or hired by the countesses to lie about them.

THE GIRL: Oh!

THE SENTRY: What is your name?

THE GIRL: Marion.

THE SENTRY: Mine is Godfrey. (*Suddenly ingratiatingly*) Do you like soldiers?

MARION: I adore them—when they are kind and let me pass their gate.

GODFREY: (*with frank finality*) Then you'll not like me.

MARION (*pouting*) Indeed I shan't! I wanted so much to see the tournament. Tell me, did many come—knights, and ladies, and squires?

GODFREY (*expansively*) So many my arms ache from saluting. Listen! (*The buzz of voices rises perceptibly.*) I wish I could meet in some quiet place the man that invented the salute.

MARION: It must be beautiful in there. How I should love to see it. Must you stay here and miss it all?

GODFREY: Not I. When the trumpet blows inside, I close the gates and go where I please

until the tourney is over. Then back I come and salute the nobility as they pass out. I wish they would get some one else to salute; I've done my share.

(Marion, taking advantage of his seeming lack of watchfulness, has edged closer toward the gate. But he sees her and stops her in time.)

GODFREY: Marion, I'm ashamed of you taking advantage of my gentlemanliness!

MARION: *(spitefully)* I wouldn't go in if you let me. I only wanted to see the proclamation.

GODFREY: Why, you can't read, can you?

MARION: No; I was only taught to do useful things. Can you?

GODFREY: I am a soldier. When there is a girl around I can do anything.

MARION: Then read it for me.

GODFREY: *(in a pompous, unnatural voice)* It goes like this: Proclamation! The Duke of Arlain doth here invite all knights of his demesne or of the imperial realm to meet—

MARION: But your eyes are not on the proclamation!

GODFREY: *(in his natural tone)* All good soldiers learn to read by ear . . . *(Then pompously)* to meet the Count of Lamneth, his enemy, in single combat. The prize that awaits the victor is the hand of his fair daughter, the Lady Yvonne, in marriage.

MARION: (*impatiently*) Go on.

GODFREY: That is all.

MARION: No; there is more written than you have had time to say—even in that absurd drawl. See, the small handwriting.

GODFREY: I do not waste time reading small handwriting; it is always unimportant.

MARION: Have you seen the Lady Yvonne?

GODFREY: Often.

MARION: Is she beautiful?

GODFREY: (*critically*) It is hard to say whether it is her fine clothes or her fine features. But whichever it is, she is hardly a shadow to you.

MARION: I think I shall like you, even if you do not let me pass. But who is the Count of Lamneth?

GODFREY: A base, foul knight, God smite him! but daring and strong as ten. He braved all our good Duke's court to meet him in the lists if they dared.

MARION: They dared, of course . . .

GODFREY: The fools, no others; and the world is well rid of them.

(*A bugle blows within.*)

GODFREY: My signal. The gates must be closed. God keep you, Marion! I shall see you when the tourney is over.

MARION: I do not wait for soldiers that obey orders.

(Godfrey shrugs his shoulders philosophically and puts his hand to the gate. As he starts to swing it shut, a loud halloo sounds down the road. Godfrey turns in surprise.)

MARION: It is a knight, running full tilt! He is almost late.

GODFREY: He is late. I can wait no longer.

MARION: Do! This may be the knight who will vanquish the wicked Count.

GODFREY: Perhaps; but not today.

(The hallooing comes stronger and stronger up the road. The gate is almost shut when a tall, sprawling figure in a long grey cloak that encumbers his feet at every step staggers into view. Just as he reaches the gate, he falls headlong in the dust of the road. The gate gives forth a final clang of its bar falling into place on the inside.)

MARION: *(in quick pity)* Oh! Oh!

(The long figure slowly rolls itself on its back, and then rises to a sitting posture, woefully rubbing its nose with its palm. In an instant Marion is at his side, kneeling in the road.)

MARION: Oh, you are hurt!

THE FIGURE: *(still rubbing its nose)* No, no; it's a pity, but I'm sound as ever, horribly, painfully sound.

(Marion sits back on her heels in sheer aston-

ishment, gazing in wonder at this astonishing creature.)

THE FIGURE: No, my nose is perfectly sound—and a broken nose would be worth a fortune. It is funny, supremely ludicrous, like a humped back or circular legs. It is a source of income like a dancing bear, and far more useful for it is always with you and needs no care. My star is extinct!

(Suddenly he draws away his hand from before his nose and tilts his head far to one side. It is a really pleasant face, clean-cut, clean-shaved, healthy, but just now it is abnormally solemn. Marion stares in ever growing astonishment at this queer personage.)

THE FIGURE: *(ruefully shaking his head)* No; she doesn't laugh. She doesn't so much as smile. That proves my nose isn't mashed in the slightest. Here at the very gates I suffer an accident, the gates are slammed in my face with nothing to show for it, not even a broken tooth to whistle through like the wind through a poor nobleman's family castle. Heigh-ho! Here, Peter, my fair lad! *(He pulls from the folds of his cloak an elaborate bauble and addresses it solemnly.)* Had I a broken nose like thine, I'd make the king himself topple from his throne. Why was I doomed to be sound?

(He rises to his feet with a half awkward,

half graceful swing of his whole body, and then turns swiftly to Marion.)

THE FIGURE: Mademoiselle, permit me to raise you to your sweet if rough-saddled feet.

MARION: (*offering her hand with a shy giggle*) I am not a mademoiselle. I am plain Marion.

THE FIGURE: Marion, yes; a name for a goddess; but plain? The gracious gods forgive thee thine untruth! Knowest thou Touchstone?

MARION: No, my lord!

THE FIGURE: (*in surprise*) Eh? My lord? Fair Marion, I suspect thou art a queen in disguise; thou conferrest titles with a lavish hand. Call me François; I am here—incognito. Well, Touchstone, the prince of good fellows, has wedded, and I'll swear his Audrey beside thee is a quince with a worm at its heart beside a peach wet with August dew. Come, let us sit here on the greensward till I spin for thee tales such as maid never heard outside the court before.

MARION: Oh, but François, you are late; the gates are closed. You cannot fight Count Lamneth for the Lady Yvonne.

FRANÇOIS: (*flinging himself on the grass and laughing uproariously*) Me, fight? Count Lamneth? For the Lady Yvonne? Hoho! I shall convulse the court.

(He leaps to his feet and flings aside his cloak revealing the parti-colored garb of a jester.)

FRANÇOIS: Behold my coat of mail.

MARION: *(in frank admiration)* It is very beautiful.

FRANÇOIS: *(flourishing his bauble)* My weapon.

MARION: You must be very strong to trust so trifling a mace.

FRANÇOIS: *(throwing back his hood and dangling his belled cap)* My helmet.

MARION: You must be very brave to fight with head so lightly shielded.

(François' mock heroics stop abruptly; he stands for a moment staring at Marion in perplexity. At last he speaks in a plainly puzzled tone.)

FRANÇOIS: Marion, from what quarter of the heavens did angels drop thee, this half hour back?

MARION: No angels dropped me. I had a father and a mother, good and honest; but they died and left me to some nuns. Oh, you would love them . . .

FRANÇOIS: Nuns are not quite in my life but continue thy life's sweet story.

MARION: And just this morning I slipped away from the convent . . .

FRANÇOIS: (*chidingly*) Marion, Marion, I fear me thou hast much to learn of this naughty world. (*In a very off-hand manner*) Thou didst never, for example, see a jester?

MARION: If I did, I did not know it.

FRANÇOIS: Oh . . . Marion, dost know how pretty thou art?

MARION: Yes, François.

FRANÇOIS: (*taken by surprise*) You do? Who told you, pray? Your lovely nuns?

MARION: Oh, no; I learned it just this morning; a beautiful soldier guarding the gate told me—and so did you, François.

FRANÇOIS: (*in mock wrath*) A soldier! How dare the unblushing knave make love to my Marion—

MARION: (*quite frightened*) Oh, you mustn't hurt him!

FRANÇOIS: (*still posing*) Great gods! is it possible you love the wretch?

MARION: Oh, no, my lord.

FRANÇOIS: (*flourishing his bauble*) Then bring on the varlet, and I'll cleave his head to his silly mouth.

MARION: No, you would not!

FRANÇOIS: Would not?

MARION: No, François. He is but a common soldier, and you . . . (*She pauses.*)

FRANÇOIS: Well, what am I?

MARION: (*dropping her eyes*) You are the knight who would have won the fair Lady Yvonne had you been on time.

FRANÇOIS: (*taking her hand*) Then, Marion, God be blessed I was not on time.

(*She lifts her head, feeling rather than understanding the compliment, and then with a contented sigh she drops it with no more than a fleeting glance into his admiring eyes. François, in true imitation of his betters, raises her hand to his lips with the utmost respect.*)

FRANÇOIS: (*with a sudden change to gayety*) Now, Marion, since I was late, too late for the sweet Lady Yvonne, we'll sit us here and await the issue of the combat.

(*He sweeps his cloak up and flings it on the green lawn.*)

FRANÇOIS: How like you grey samite over green velvet for your couch, my lady?

MARION: I adore it.

(*He leads her with dignified tread to the seat.*)

FRANÇOIS: There; enthrone thyself, fairest of maidens, while I sit at thy feet and prate—of what shall I prate?

MARION: (*leaning forward eagerly*) Of the brave deeds you have done, of the fair ladies that have loved you, of the heroes that have fallen before your stroke.

FRANÇOIS: You would believe all that if I told you?

MARION: (*trustingly*) Are you not brave and strong and beautiful?

FRANÇOIS: (*plainly puzzled*) Am I?

MARION (*admiringly*) I love modest men. Begin to prate!

FRANÇOIS: (*still wondering*) You love . . . (*He takes up her challenge and launches forth in his best style.*) There was one the queen loved above all others, more than the king or her son, the fair young prince, or any of her waiting-women.

MARION: How beautiful he must have been! Had he long silken hair?

FRANÇOIS: Yes.

MARION: And quick, bright eyes?

FRANÇOIS: Those too.

MARION: And was he swift of foot?

FRANÇOIS: Very.

MARION: I was sure of it! Proceed with thy prating.

FRANÇOIS: One day the queen was walking with him over a bridge; I followed unnoticed. There was a scream. I looked up. He, the queen's beloved, had fallen into the stream. Without a word, I flung aside my cloak and plunged over the parapet into the torrent. Hand over hand I swam to save him; and as he rose

to the surface, I twined my fingers into his long, silken hair and bore him safely to shore.

MARION: (*enthusiastically*) Oh, I knew you were brave and daring! Did the queen love you for it?

FRANÇOIS: Tremendously!

MARION: And did he, the queen's beloved, load you with blessings.

FRANÇOIS: Not one word. He only snapped at me and barked.

MARION: (*wide-eyed and indignant*) He was jealous.

FRANÇOIS: Poodles always are! But of the ladies who have loved me. I swear to thee, Marion, no lady of the court falls ill or into depression or feels torn with the pangs of unrequited love but my presence is enough to make her spirits leap up in a burst of joy.

MARION: I knew it!

FRANÇOIS: They love my songs, my wit, my swift feet—

MARION: And the fact that you have never yet been outmatched in single combat.

FRANÇOIS: (*surprised to a sharp pause*) Eh?

MARION: You haven't, have you?

FRANÇOIS: (*rising to the occasion and lifting his bauble solemnly*) I swear to thee, fair Marion, the bravest knight in the realm has felt my weapon tickling his ribs.

MARION: (*with a sigh*) What a pity you were too late to fight the foul Count of Lamneth!

FRANÇOIS: You are sure I could defeat him?

MARION: (*her eyes shining*) You are so brave and strong and beautiful, you could not fail.

FRANÇOIS: (*springing confidently to his feet*) By my head, Marion, you are right. I feel it. With you to cheer me on, I could crush him to earth. (*He kneels once more at her side, and speaks very tenderly.*) Marion, you are not sorry I came too late to win the Lady Yvonne, are you?

(*Marion's eyes dare not meet his ardent gaze.*)

FRANÇOIS: (*insistently*) You are not sorry, are you?

MARION: (*scarcely audible*) No.

FRANÇOIS: (*still insistent but very tender*) And the reason you are not sorry is because you love me . . . isn't it?

MARION: I am a poor barefooted girl, and you are—

FRANÇOIS: Whatever your love can make me.

(*An unexpectedly loud shout rises on the breeze swelling to a chorus of jeers and hisses. They rise apprehensively to their feet.*)

FRANÇOIS: What can that mean?

MARION: Oh, it means that the wicked Count

of Lamneth has triumphed . . . because you were not there to save our blessed Duke.

(François hesitates for a moment uncertainly; and then leaping to the vine, he scales the wall and perches himself on the top. Marion runs to the foot of the wall and stands with her feverish cheek pressed against the cold stone.)

MARION: You are my eyes, François; tell me what you see.

FRANÇOIS: It is all a mad confusion. They are bearing a knight from the field, and the nobility hiss and shout in derision. Ah, there! The Count of Lamneth is striding across the lists in all his arrogance toward the canopy 'neath which sits the good Duke and his fair daughter. She is shrinking back as he begins to speak.

MARION: What does he say?

FRANÇOIS: I cannot hear, but the Duke is rising fearfully; and as he answers the foul knight, the Lady Yvonne buries her face in her hands.

MARION: François, my François! It must not be! You must save her!

FRANÇOIS: *(scrambling down the wall and taking her outstretched hand)* I? . . . Why, Marion . . . how can I?

MARION: *(looking at him with infinite trust)* Because you are you, and I believe in you.

(Very reverently he bends over her hand and kisses it. As he does, the gate swings open and Godfrey, the sentry, appears trembling in the opening, his spear swaying desperately and his knees fairly clicking together.)

GODFREY: *(his teeth chattering)* So, Marion, you have found a lover while our fair Lady Yvonne is being snatched away by the wicked Count of Lamneth.

MARION: *(disregarding him, her whole soul centered on François)* Now is the time. Leave me, and save the Lady Yvonne.

(Obediently, François drops her hand and springs toward the still trembling sentry.)

FRANÇOIS: *(imperiously)* Your spear!

GODFREY: What?

(François snatches it from his hand.)

FRANÇOIS: Your shield . . . your sword!

(He accompanies each request with an effective movement.)

FRANÇOIS: Now, your breastplate and cloak and helmet.

(He tears them from the frightened sentry and begins to cover his own motley with them. Marion runs forward eagerly.)

MARION: Let me serve as squire! *(She helps him with the cumbersome armor.)* My hands are quicker than yours, and we must speed. This buckle here . . . this leathern thong goes

here . . . now for the belt strap, catch the sword off the ground . . . how snug the corslet fits . . . and over all the cape . . . now for the helmet, bend your head a bit, I am so tiny, I scarce can reach you unless you stoop! . . . There . . . there . . . You are a knight!

FRANÇOIS: (*kneeling and taking her hand*) I go at your command. Tell me that your heart goes with me.

MARION: It does, and you will bring it back to me when you return. François, you are perfect . . . all but one thing.

(*She slips a ribbon from her waist, kisses it and holds it out to him.*)

MARION: My token!

(*François kisses it and kneels while she winds it into his helmet.*)

MARION: Remember, François, you fight to save the Lady Yvonne from the Count of Lam-neth, but it is not she you love.

FRANÇOIS: I shall save the Lady Yvonne from the wicked count; but I am your knight.

(*He leaps out through the gate and into the court beyond. There is a moment's surprised silence in the crowded lists, and then a loud shout and applause. Godfrey is stunned by the suddenness of it all, but Marion darts now to the unguarded gate and stands, her hands clasped ecstatically, watching her knight. The*

cheering grows within, and then above it rises the sound of a conflict, of steel on steel.)

GODFREY: (*roughly, but still frightened*) So your lover is a thief, to rob me of my arms and my very clothes!

MARION: (*joyously, her eyes on the lists within*) My lover is the bravest, truest knight in the world. Look!

(*Compelled by her gesture, Godfrey looks and then stares in astonishment.*)

GODFREY: Why, thy lover is a hurricane. Then he was in disguise and not really . . . I should have guessed. What blows he rains! What swiftness and skill! Why, the wicked count gives ground at every step before him.

MARION: I knew it would be so; I was sure of it! He is a true knight, and he loves me!

GODFREY: (*his mind distracted from the conflict by the boast*) Loves you? With what kind of a love?

MARION: (*proudly*) With a love that made him kiss my hand when he might have kissed my lips.

GODFREY: (*contemptuously*) Don't be a fool, Marion! He is a knight; his fighting proves that, and you are only a peasant girl.

MARION: But he is a true knight, and he loves me, and I believe in him! Look! . . . Oh . . . oh!

(A loud trumpet blast sounds.)

MARION: *(clasping her hands in rapture)* He has won! My knight, my François, has crushed the wicked Count of Lamneth to his knees. *(In a sudden burst of grateful prayer she flings herself on her knees in the grass.)* Sweet Mother, thanks, a thousand thanks from François and Marion!

(A second trumpet call and Godfrey in his half undress stands at attention near the gate presenting an imaginary spear in salute, as through the gate file two rows of guards, then a group of courtiers, then the Duke himself, and finally François leading the fair Lady Yvonne by the hand. The jester looks every inch a knight, his helmeted head flung far back, and his borrowed armor clanking proudly as he strides. Marion stands gazing at him in loving admiration without any touch of surprise, like a mother who has always known her boy would prove a hero.)

THE DUKE: *(speaking in a feeble but proud voice)* My lord, it is your privilege to keep your identity a secret, for you are a brave and true man whose deeds bespeak your nobility louder than any title.

(François bows gracefully while Lady Yvonne turns on him a look of undisguised admiration.)

THE DUKE: You have righted my wrongs against the foul Count of Lamneth, and you have saved my daughter from a man she loathed with all her soul.

THE LADY YVONNE: (*bowing low but keeping her eyes admiringly on François*) Our Blessed Lady guides brave knights like you to maidens in distress as I was.

FRANÇOIS: (*with an air that belies his words*) You praise me too much! It was as nothing.

THE LADY YVONNE: As nothing to one who like you is brave and strong. But others failed where you have triumphed. And (*looking him full in the eyes*) I am glad they failed that you might prove victor.

(*François, pride marking his every movement, lifts her hand to his lips with a quickly responsive fervor. Marion sees this, and a pained expression tightens the corners of her mouth, but only for an instant.*)

THE DUKE: You have won the right, my lord, to claim your prize, if you but wish it. You know, of course, the prize that had been offered to him who should subdue my enemy?

FRANÇOIS: I do, my lord Duke, and because of that—

(*A slight cry escaping from Marion turns his look toward her, and he stops abruptly.*)

THE DUKE: As I said, I do not know your an-

cestry nor your rank; but the eyes of the Lady Yvonne tell how plainly her heart coincides with her father's wish that so brave a knight might stand ever on guard near his castle.

FRANÇOIS: (*turning to Yvonne*) If I should claim my prize, would she come to me willingly?

THE LADY YVONNE: With all the joy of her soul.

FRANÇOIS: Then, my lord Duke, I beg of you without delay, pronounce the nuptials—

(*Marion during this conversation has been slinking closer and closer to the wall; but as François speaks this treason to her love, she suddenly sobs a low, but distinct moan, and drops half fainting to the greensward. Godfrey, forgetting his post, runs to her side while the whole court turns to see the cause of this unexpected interruption.*)

MARION: (*sobbing bitterly*) He is no true knight; he is no true knight!

THE DUKE: (*impatiently*) What is the meaning of this unseemly uproar?

GODFREY: (*supporting Marion's limp figure*) It is a girl, my lord, that this knight here vowed he loved.

FRANÇOIS: (*in a sudden agony of fear*) My lord duke, I swear to you—

THE LADY YVONNE: (*coldly, in a jealous rage*) So, that is the kind of knight you are! You win

me for my rank and wealth; but you give your love to another!

FRANÇOIS: Lady Yvonne, on my honor—

THE LADY YVONNE: Your honor? Why, 'tis her token you wear even now in your helmet?

(She points with trembling finger at Marion's ribbon still fluttering in the slight breeze.)

FRANÇOIS: *(with his newly learned pride)* I am a knight; you have seen what I am. I wear no peasant girl's token in my helmet.

(As he speaks, Marion springs to her feet, trembling and pale, but with the pain of disillusionment holding her taut. François grasps the ribbon in his hand and drags it rudely from his helmet. But in that hasty gesture, he pulls off the helmet as well. It clatters to the ground, and he stands with the bells on his jester's cap tinkling merrily from the sudden shock. The Duke, the Lady Yvonne, and the courtiers stare at this sudden revelation in utter amazement. François, quite unaware of his tinkling bells, goes on blusteringly.)

FRANÇOIS: I am a knight, I say, and yon peasant girl has naught to do with me.

THE DUKE: You, a knight? With a jester's cap beneath your helmet?

(François' hand rises mechanically and touches the bells which jingle more merrily than

ever. The Lady Yvonne has shrunk away from him as if in fear of contact.)

THE DUKE: Guards! *(Two guards leap forward at his bidding.)* Strip off his armor. What masquerade is this? A fool wearing the armor of a knight?

(In an instant they have removed his armor and his cloak, and he stands stricken and abashed in his jester's garb. There is a hesitant, surprised silence among the courtiers, and then a rising titter.)

THE DUKE: *(angrily)* Silence! *(The courtiers stop their mirth abruptly.)* So, you would not tell your rank because you had none. No rank? The brazen audacity of this staggers me! A fool, a court fool . . . and he dares . . . and my daughter!

(The Lady Yvonne covers her face in an agony of angry weeping.)

THE DUKE: I have a mind to hang you from my battlements. But I reserve punishments like that for warriors and fallen knights, not for fools. No . . . Ladies and Knights of my court, you have been witness to the effrontery of this jester. Treat the fool as a fool merits.

(At his word François is surrounded by the courtiers, who mock him, flinging jibes at him, rapping his tingling bells, pelting him with flowers, laughing uproariously the while. The

Lady Yvonne has torn herself from the arms of a lady-in-waiting to fling herself upon the Duke's breast and is sobbing out her injured pride.

(Marion stands at one side, her hands clenched at her side, and indignation burning hot on her cheeks. Then, as the mocking reaches its height, she rushes through the crowd of jeering courtiers, and flinging them to either side, throws herself protectingly across the pitiful figure of the jester. With her arms twined about his neck she speaks to the crowd over her heaving shoulder.)

MARION: *(in fierce wrath)* Back, you cowards who dared not do half what he has done! And you, you heartless tabby cats with your hisses and your claws, touch him again or laugh at him just once, and you will feel my nail sinking into your own tender skins.

THE DUKE: *(blusteringly)* How dare you, girl—

MARION: *(turning toward him but still holding close to François)* And how dare you, you who owe him so much? He slew your enemy and saved your daughter; have you forgotten that? And because he is . . . not a knight, you dare to treat him thus. If that is knightly honor, then I am glad he is not a knight. And as for you, Lady Yvonne, console yourself; he never

loved you; he merely pitied you in your distress. You need not fear; he would never have sullied your pride. François, you were speaking when they halted you. Finish that sentence as your heart dictates: "My Lord Duke, I beg of you without delay, pronounce the nuptials of . . ."

FRANÇOIS: (*not quite sure of himself still, but catching once more her spirit*) Of François, the jester, and Marion, the peasant maid.

(*Marion buries her face in his breast to hide her sudden confusion and shame. The court stands silent. The Lady Yvonne, her tears quickly dried, looks with quivering lips and wrathful eyes at this daring peasant girl and her jester lover. But the Duke, making the best of a bad situation, ignores the pair and addresses his courtiers.*)

THE DUKE: (*very haughtily*) Fair ladies and brave knights, the love affairs of fools and peasant maids have little interest for you or for me. The meats grow cold upon our board, and the wine craves our thirsting throats. Let us go within together. Lady Yvonne, my daughter, your hand!

(*Quietly the court withdraws, leaving François and Marion alone. As Godfrey clangs the gates from within, Marion loosens her arms from about his neck and walks slowly away,*

leaving François still dazed and uncertain. Then he swiftly shakes himself; and as his bells tinkle merrily from his cap, something of his old self returns.)

FRANÇOIS: *(with a quaint shrug)* Jove's ears! It was a beautiful dream while it lasted and . . . at least, I fought like a knight.

(He picks up his bauble and slips on his long grey cloak. For a moment he hesitates, and then he moves abashed to Marion, who stands with averted face.)

FRANÇOIS: Thou wilt not believe me, Marion, but never have I felt toward thee as now. Thou wert the one that was brave . . . perhaps it was thy bravery that fought in me, who knows? But Marion, what more could be expected of me, the fool? It was the suddenness of it all, the glory of the prize I had won . . . Why, she was as a withered flower to thee and . . . she had no heart, while the dear Christ gave thee thine. I am sorry I won. Had I lost, I had come back to thee a jester; now I must leave thee, a fool.

(He takes her unresisting hand and looks at it for a space, but drops it without daring to kiss it. Then he wraps his cloak about him and turns away. But as he takes a first step, Marion with a swift curve has come before him in his path, her hands outstretched, her head thrown back.)

MARION: And I am glad you won, François, glad with all my heart.

FRANÇOIS: (*with a joyous cry*) Marion! You . . . oh, you cannot after all my baseness.

MARION: I can. Especially after that.

FRANÇOIS: Oh, I am not worthy.

MARION: I know it, François, but . . .

FRANÇOIS: Then, Marion, you still love me . . . even as I am?

MARION: (*radiantly*) That would not be love. I love you for what my eyes have seen love make you.

(*He folds her in his arms, though he does not understand the fulness of her meaning, as*

the scene closes.)

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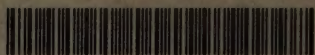
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